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Project/Thesis

"There Were Also Women"

The Gospel According to Anna

BY

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Master of Theological Studies, Atlantic School of Theology, 1994

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

May, 1996

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1996

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Acknowledgements

I wish at to acknowledge my indebtedness to the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, which has awakened my mind to the stories of the women disciples of Jesus; to Alison Cheek for opening my eyes and freeing my imagination to the possibilities of creative actualization, and also for allowing me to appropriate Anna; and to Carter Heyward for encouraging my work on Wisdom christology. I am profoundly grateful to Joanna Dewey, whose oral presentation of the Gospel of Mark provided the inspiration for the narrative portion of this thesis, whose "permission" made it possible for me to attempt it, and whose critical guidance helped me to complete it. This work owes a great deal to her scholarly advice and clarity of thought. I would also like to thank my friends, both those in the community of the Episcopal Divinity School and those outside that community, for their friendship and support. My special thanks go to Marje Brady, Marilyn Schnare and John Boyd.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Chapter 1: Feminist Biblical Criticism 6

Chapter 2: Women in the Reign-of-God Movement and the Early Church 17

The Role of Women in the Reign-of-God Movement 20

The Role of Women in the Earliest Churches 30

Women's Roles in the Church and the Shift from Orality to Textuality 37

The Role of Women in the Church: Second and Third Centuries 45

Conclusion 50

Excursus: Alison Cheek's Letter from Junia to Anna 53

My Letter from Anna to Junia in Reply 58

Chapter 3: The Gospel According to Anna 63

Chapter 4: Anna's Wisdom (Sophia) Christology 100

Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible and Intertestamental Literature 103

Sophia in the Early Church 108

(a) Paul's Letters 108

(b) The Sayings Gospel Q and the Gospel of Luke 109

(c) The Gospel of Matthew 110

(d) The Gospel of John 113

Toward a Sophia Christology for Today 116

Chapter 5: Using "The Gospel According to Anna" in Women's Groups 126

Plan for a Bible Study Group 128

A Program for Use in Women's Centres 147

Epilogue 150

Bibliography 155

Introduction

Sometime around the mid-fifties, probably between 54 and 57 CE, Paul wrote a letter to the churches in Rome, explaining his understanding of the gospel and how it applied to Christians of that city. At the end of the letter, he told the Roman Christians that he hoped to visit them soon, and sent greetings to many of the (presumably) prominent people in the churches of Rome.[1] Among those mentioned were several women, whom Paul called his co-workers in Christ, including Junia, to whom he refers in Romans 16:7 as an apostle:

> Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives, who were in prison with me, they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

Many translations of this passage give the name of the second person in Romans 16:7 as Junias or Julius, leaving the impression that the person was a man.[2] However, it is important to note that there was never any question during the first several centuries of Christianity concerning the gender of this person. The name was Junia, and she was a woman, and as such she was recognized by the commentators of the Patristic era, including Origen, John

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[1]Some scholars believe that Chapter 16 was not originally part of Paul's letter to the Romans, but was the conclusion of a letter to the church in Ephesus. However, the destination of the greetings in Romans 16 has no bearing on the present study.

[2]The King James Version (1611), New KJV (1982), Revised English Bible (1989), New American Bible (1986) and NRSV (1989) all give the name as Junia; however, the first three refer to Andronicus and Junia as "my kins*men*," "country*men*" or "*fellow*-country*men*"; the NAB and NRSV use the gender-neutral term "relatives." The RSV (1971), New Jerusalem Bible (1985), New American Standard Bible (1985) and Contemporary English Version (1995) all refer to Junias; the first three refer to them as "my kins*men*," while the CEV uses the gender-neutral term "my relatives."

Chrysostom and Jerome. Not until the Middle Ages did someone arbitrarily change the name to a masculine one, having presumably decided that a woman could not possibly be an apostle,[3] and we are still living with the consequences of that stroke of the pen.

Some years ago, Alison Cheek used this passage for one of the small group bible studies that formed part of her doctoral thesis.[4] She included as an appendix to her thesis an imaginary letter from the apostle Junia to a friend, the teacher and missionary Anna. In this letter, Junia urges Anna to write down the stories and sayings of Jesus, partly to ensure that those who would come after, who had not been followers of Jesus during his earthly ministry, might better understand the meaning of the reign of God as he had proclaimed it, and partly in order to counteract some of Paul's pronouncements on the place of women in church leadership (e.g. 1 Cor 14:34-35). The text of Dr. Cheek's letter will be found in the Excursus following Chapter 2.

In the fall term of the 1994-95 academic year, I wrote as a term paper for a course on "Healing, Suffering and the Death of Christ in the New Testament" a short Gospel as it

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[3] For example, John Chrysostom in *Epistolam ad Romanos*, Homilia 31,2, says, "How great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was even deemed worthy of this title of apostle." The first commentator who took the name to be masculine was Aegidius of Rome (1245-1316) in his *Opera Exegetica*. See Bernadette Brooten, "Junia... Outstanding among the Apostles (Romans 16:7)," in *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration*, eds. A. and L. Swidler (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 141.

[4] Alison Cheek, *Towards a Feminist Biblical Interpretation: Its Use In Small Group Bible Study*. Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, MA, unpublished thesis, 1990.

might have been written by a woman disciple of Jesus. With the permission of her creator, I "borrowed" Anna to be the author of this Gospel, and at the same time I identified her as the "bent-over" woman in Luke's Gospel (13:10-13). The paper represented my reconstruction of Anna's imagined response to Junia's request. In Anna's telling of the Gospel, I tried to be true to what I believe to have been the central message of Jesus during his earthly ministry, and to present my understanding of his teachings and healings, of suffering (both his own and that of others) and of his death.

This present work is a development from the "Gospel According to Anna," and includes an expanded version of the original Gospel. As with the first paper, I approached this expanded Gospel in much the same way that I would imagine the Evangelists approached their work, although admittedly with less insight into the world-view of their time. Accordingly, I have treated the Jesus stories contained in the four Gospels as my sources, and I have chosen to use those stories that helped me to make my theological points, while leaving others out, partly because of space constraints but more importantly because they did not bear on my main task, which was to present my feminist understanding of both the person of Jesus and the meaning of the reign of God as exemplified in his teachings and praxis. Like the Evangelists, I have not attempted to differentiate between those stories that go back to the historical Jesus and those that are later constructs, and also like them, I have not hesitated to construct or shape stories to suit my theological purposes. The result is, I hope, a brief glimpse of how the story of Jesus might have appeared to a woman disciple who, unlike any of the canonical evangelists, was an eyewitness to many of the events of his

life, death and resurrection, as imagined by a late twentieth century feminist.

The structure of this current paper is as follows:

Chapter 1: A brief summary of feminist critique of the Gospels, all of which were probably written by men, as they have come down to us. The invisibility of women generally, and the anonymity of most of the women who are mentioned, as well as the predominantly androcentric and patriarchal nature of the text will be discussed. This chapter will also include a brief description of methodology.

Chapter 2: An outline of the downward trajectory of the role of women in the early church. Two of the factors that led to this downward trajectory will be discussed: the shift from orality to textuality, and the shift of liturgical space from the private to the public sphere.

Excursus: Alison Cheek's letter from Junia to Anna, and my letter from Anna to Junia in reply.

Chapter 3: "The Gospel According to Anna."

Chapter 4: An examination of the church's earliest christologies centring mainly on Wisdom or Sophia christology. This chapter will also outline my own view of Jesus' life and death, as I attempt to define my own Sophia christology .

Chapter 5: An outline of a bible-study program for a women's group, in which Anna's Gospel is studied in parallel with the canonical Gospels. The objectives of the program are:

a) to heighten critical awareness of the androcentricity of the canonical texts,

b) to develop insights into what difference the gender of the story-teller makes to the story,

c) to use this process as an introduction to feminist biblical interpretation.

Epilogue: A reflection on the process of imagining, developing and completing a creative project such as this, which was quite different from any other work that I have ever undertaken.

Before I begin, I think that it is important for me to identify myself to my readers. I am not a generic "woman," reflecting the views of all women, but a particular woman, speaking from my own particularity: that of a sixty-seven year old, white, middle-class, reasonably well-educated Canadian woman from Nova Scotia. As a feminist, it is my belief that there is no such thing as unbiased, gender-neutral, objective interpretation, but that every interpreter brings her/his own biases to the text, biblical or otherwise. Therefore, in writing as a feminist, I believe that I am obliged to identify myself, my social location, and my biases. In contrast to the supposedly objective masculinist scholarship that supports or reflects the status quo of the biblical text, my engaged feminist scholarship critiques the androcentrism and patriarchalism of the biblical text.

Chapter 1

Feminist Biblical Criticism

In her 1991 book on biblical interpretation, *The Revelatory Text,* Sandra Schneiders speaks of how, once her feminist consciousness had been raised, the biblical text began to reveal itself to her "as not only an androcentric and patriarchal document but one that had played and continues to play a major role in causing and legitimating the oppression of women in families, churches, and societies."[5] In addition to the androcentrism and patriarchalism of the biblical text itself, it is also fair to say that most biblical scholarship is predominantly androcentric. Indeed, until the very recent past, the vast majority of biblical scholarship has been carried out by scholars who are educated males, whose interpretations supported the androcentric and patriarchal mind-set of the text. Feminist biblical scholars have for some time been attempting to deal with androcentrism and patriarchalism in the biblical canon in many ways, which vary according to their social locations (including gender, class, race and nationality); religious beliefs, particularly concerning the authority of scripture; and past experiences of the bible as oppressive or liberating. In this chapter I shall try to set out my understanding of the basic premises of feminist biblical criticism, its various forms, and the features that mark it as distinct or different from non-feminist or androcentric biblical criticism. For the sake of clarity, and in order to avoid misunderstandings, I shall define the terms used in this discussion.

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[5]Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 3.

While originally the term *feminist* may have referred to a person who sought justice and equality only for women, and while some may still understand it in this more limited sense, I prefer to use Katharine Doob Sakenfeld's broader definition of a feminist as "one who seeks justice and equality for all people and who is especially concerned for the fate of women - all women - in the midst of 'all people.' "[6] This definition, as she goes on to point out, links feminism and feminist critiques not only with issues of sexism but also with issues of racism and classism, and I would add, with issues of heterosexism, colonialism and all other instances of domination/subordination.

Patriarchy in its common definition refers to the structures of society that prescribe and enable the domination of men over women, but it is used more broadly as "a socio-economic/political/religious structure or system in which some men rule over other men, women, children and slaves."[7] In place of "patriarchy", Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza uses the term "kyriarchy", since it does not give the appearance of limiting itself to the sex/gender system but is more descriptive of this broader understanding of the "interlocking structures of domination."[8] For many feminists today these structures also include the non-human part of creation, i.e. other animals and our shared environment. The expansion

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[6]Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, "Feminist Perspectives on Bible and Theology: An Introduction to Selected Issues and Literature," *Interpretation* 42 (1988), 5.

[7]Joanna Dewey, "Teaching the New Testament from a Feminist Perspective" *Theological Education* 26 (1989), 87.

[8]Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 8.

of these two terms "feminist" and "patriarchy" broaden the area of concern beyond the status of women to include all of creation.

Androcentrism may be defined as a mind-set in which the male is understood as the human norm, and the female is rendered invisible behind the human (male) form.[9] In androcentric thought the female is regarded as deviant from and inferior to the male, who represents the human norm. In addition, the female is subsumed within the grammatically masculine form, forcing the reader to decide if females are included when only masculine gander is used, for example, using the denotation "brethren" or "men" even when it is clear from the text that women are also being addressed. Androcentric language has the effect of forcing the female reader to "read as a male", since, as Susan Durber points out, androcentric texts "construct for themselves a male reader."[10] She uses as an example the two parables in Luke 15, noting that in 15:4, the Lukan Jesus says, "If one of *you* has a hundred sheep and loses one of them...", but that in 15:8 he says "Or again, if a *woman* has ten silver coins and loses one of them...".[11] The phrase "one of you" indicates that the author was clearly constructing a male audience. In androcentric texts women are either totally invisible or considered to be so lacking in importance that they are not worth mentioning as separate entities. When women are mentioned, it is primarily as an

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[9]Dewey, "Teaching the New Testament," 87.

[10]Susan Durber, "The Female Reader of the Parables of the Lost," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 45 (1992), 70.

[11]Ibid., 71.

appurtenance of a male - wife, mother, daughter -"they are present only as the grammatical objects of the verbs of others' lives."[12]

The problem for feminist biblical scholars is how to deal with the text and its male-oriented interpreters. For some, the answer has been total rejection not only of the Bible but also of the church whose book it is. At the other end of the spectrum are those who accept the text and its androcentrism and patriarchalism as "the word of God", inerrant because divinely inspired, clothed with sacred authority, and therefore not to be questioned. Between these two extremes of "rejectionist" and "loyalist" lies a broad spectrum of opinion which has been separated by Carolyn Osiek into three "hermeneutical alternatives": revisionist, sublimationist and liberationist. The revisionist model considers that the androcentrism and patriarchalism of the bible are culturally determined, and can be separated from the tradition of Christianity by removing the cultural envelope that surrounds the salvific message, thus achieving the reform of the tradition. The sublimationist model is grounded in the idea of the "otherness" of the feminine; it operates by searching for and glorifying "the eternal feminine" in biblical symbolism and by emphasizing the essential and God-ordained differences between feminine and masculine. The liberationist model "proclaims that the central message of the bible is human liberation,

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[12]Sharon Ringe, "The Word of God May Be Hazardous to Your Health", *Theology Today* 49 (1992), 371.

that this is in fact the meaning of salvation."[13] Both in its avowed ethical stance - pro justice and equality- and in its admitted advocacy position - pro women - feminist liberation criticism is, like all liberation theologies, "engaged criticism."[14]

Most systems of classification that locate individuals within defined boundaries must be read with the understanding that it is not possible to place people in rigid categories nor to expect them to stay there forever. Most feminist biblical scholars, with the exception of Osiek's rejectionists and loyalists, fit best within one of the other three categories, but many embrace from time to time some of the ideas of one of the other groups. As Dewey has stated, "It should be noted that feminist theologians and scholars do not adhere rigidly to one of the five positions, but may well oscillate among them depending on content and context."[15] My position is definitely within the liberationist group. I believe that "*only* that which is liberating for women and for all oppressed groups is revelatory and thus authoritative."[16] My stance in approaching the biblical text is therefore liberationist, although my Protestant background conditions to a certain extent my view of the authority of scripture.

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[13]Carolyn Osiek, "The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives" in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship,* ed. Adela Yarbro Collins, (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985): 93-106.

[14]Joanna Dewey, "Feminist Readings, Gospel Narrative and Critical Theory," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 22 (1992), 167.

[15]Ibid., 89.

[16]Ibid., 89.

It should be pointed out that feminist biblical criticism is not simply another form of criticism, operating parallel to critical methods such as historical-critical, narrative, reader-response, and so on. It is, rather, "an approach that affects how one uses any specific method."[17] It also differs from other non-feminist, *androcentric* critical approaches, which Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza refers to as "malestream,"[18] in its insistence that there is no such thing as unbiased, neutral, objective interpretation of any historical text, including the Bible. "Malestream" biblical criticism, on the other hand, assumes that "scholars who do not reflect or articulate their political allegiances are 'objective', free from bias, non-partisan and scientific."[19] It has been said that in the field of interpretation of the visual arts there is "no innocent eye."[20] Just so in biblical interpretation every interpreter brings her/his own interests and positions to the text, even in such a basic concept as what

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[17]Dewey, "Feminist Readings", 167.

[18]Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's use of this term dates at least from 1992, when she referred to "malestream" biblical studies in *But She Said* (Boston: Beacon Press), 7.

[19]Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Early Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), xvi.

[20]This phrase, quoted by Sallie McFague in *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), page 55, originated with Ernst Gombrich in *Art and Illusion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960; pages 297-8 and elsewhere), and was quoted by Nelson Goodman on pages 7-8 of *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, 2nd edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1976). Although Gombrich used the phrase in reference to visual art, Goodman applies it to symbol-making in general, and McFague to the hermeneutics of interpreting Scripture. Goodman says, "[T]here is no innocent eye. The eye comes always ancient to its work, obsessed by its own past and by old and new insinuations of the ear, nose, tongue, fingers, heart, and brain. . . . Not only how but what it sees is regulated by need and prejudice . . . The myths of the innocent eye and of the absolute given are unholy accomplices." This seems to me to be an apt description of the myth of an objective hermeneutical stance.

questions to ask of the text. No scholarship is gender-neutral; it is either "masculinist or androcentrically engaged scholarship that supports or reflects the status quo,"[21] or else it is engaged feminist scholarship that critiques the status quo. It is a truism that historical texts are written by the historical winners, and until very recently they have also been interpreted by those for whom maintenance of the existing power structures was of prime importance.

In the preceding discussion of feminist biblical interpretation, I have focussed on the work of white, Euro-American scholars. Women from the "two-thirds world," African women, Asian women, women of indigenous peoples, African-American women, and many others have made their own unique contributions to the enterprise of re-interpreting and re-claiming the Bible for all people. The work of scholars such as Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Kwok Pui Lan, and Clarice Martin,[22] to name only a few, illustrates the way people who are colonized and enslaved read the Bible subversively, using it as a resource that tells the story of their own oppression, and that speaks of their own hopes for justice and liberation.

The methodology that I shall employ in my reconstruction of the story of Jesus and the reign-of-God movement is taken from the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and is

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[21]Dewey, "Feminist Readings", 167.

[22]See, for example, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995); Kwok Pui Lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995); Clarice J. Martin, "A Chamberlain's Journey and the Challenge of Interpretation for Liberation." *Semeia* 47 (1989): 105-135.

most fully and clearly articulated in her *Bread Not Stone.* Schüssler Fiorenza begins by describing the dominant paradigm of biblical interpretation as ascribing universal implications to the biblical text, thereby declaring it to be a "mythical archetype" which establishes "an ideal form for all times, an unchanging pattern of behaviour and theological structure for the community in which it serves as Sacred Scripture."[23] In contrast, in her proposed feminist model of biblical criticism, the bible is viewed not as archetypal myth but as "historical prototype", functioning not as "authoritative source but as a resource for women's struggle for liberation."[24] This feminist model consists of four elements:

1) *A hermeneutics of suspicion*, which approaches the androcentric text with a high index of suspicion rather than with a hermeneutics of affirmation and consent.

2) *A hermeneutics of proclamation*, which evaluates biblical texts and their power to oppress or liberate, and insists that oppressive texts cannot claim the authority of divine revelation.

3) *A hermeneutics of remembrance*, which recognizes that many patriarchal texts are not descriptive of women's lives but are prescriptive, and which uses historical-critical methods to reconstruct actual women's history from these often prescriptive biblical texts about women.

4) *A hermeneutics of creative actualization*, which uses artistic imagination "to retell biblical stories from a feminist perspective, to reformulate biblical visions and

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[23]Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 10.

[24]Ibid., 14.

injunctions in the perspective of the discipleship of equals, to create narrative amplifications of the feminist remnants that have survived in patriarchal texts."[25]

In my work in general, and in this paper in particular, I use all four of these hermeneutical options to varying extents. I approach every biblical text with a *hermeneutics of suspicion*, looking for evidence of androcentrism and patriarchy, for the gaps and silences, for who speaks and who does not speak, for whose point of view is represented and whose is not. I use a *hermeneutics of remembrance* when I employ historical-critical methods to re-member the women's stories that are concealed by the androcentrism and patriarchalism of the text. In Anna's re-telling of the gospel, I use a *hermeneutics of creative actualization* to re-create the vision of the discipleship of equals that I believe was the meaning of the reign of God proclaimed by Jesus and his followers.

I have left to the last Schüssler Fiorenza's second element: a *hermeneutics of proclamation*. Coming from a Protestant tradition, one of my main concerns is to be clear and accurate in the definition of this element, since it bears upon the question of the authority of scripture. The question of the authority of scripture is always an important one, since the language of scripture is not only informative but performative. By this I mean that the language of scripture does not only provide information about the experience of faith communities of the past, but more importantly, as Sharon Ringe says, it "proclaims, bears witness, evokes a response, and leads to engagement in the same experience

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[25]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 15-22.

or pattern of relationship with God as that which engaged the original authors."[26] For Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza the authority of scripture is located "within the struggle for the liberation of women and all oppressed people,"[27] or, as she says elsewhere, "The locus or place of divine revelation and grace is therefore not the Bible or the tradition of a patriarchal church but the *ekklesia* of women and the lives of women who live the 'option for our women selves.' "[28] But for Ringe the authority of scripture lies in the fact that it is performative, and the locus of that authority is the "dialogic relationship between the ancient text and subsequent communities of faith, where Scripture continues to perform in such a way that it provides for those communities a glimpse of the transcendent reality of God."[29] For this reason, some women, especially many Protestant women, are reluctant to declare that any biblical passage is not authoritative or not revelatory - that is, not the word of God. Others, including myself, agree that there are many biblical texts that are not revelatory or redemptive, but some are concerned with the criteria used to discriminate between revelatory and non-revelatory texts.

Rosemary Radford Ruether responds to the question of criteria for regarding a text as revelatory by declaring that "whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of

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[26]Sharon H. Ringe, "Standing Toward the Text", *Theology Today* 43 (1987), 553.

[27]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 60.

[28]Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose or to Reject: Continuing our Critical Work", in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible,* ed. Letty M. Russell, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 128.

[29]Ringe, "Standing", 553.

women must be presumed not to reflect the divine or an authentic relation to the divine" and is therefore judged not to be redemptive.[30] Although most feminists, including myself, would agree with this position, for many Protestants there is a problem with the use of a criterion extrinsic to the text, since, as Sharon Ringe points out, "acceptance of it would leave us open to the importation of other extrinsic criteria of authority."[31] In place of this criterion, Ringe proposes the vision of the "transformed and redeemed creation" in Isaiah 11: 6-9, in which "our usual categories of strong and weak and our ready labels of natural enemies are transcended in a peaceable realm."[32] She finds in verse 9 ("They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea") a criterion of "no hurt or destruction" of the weak by the strong, of the powerless by the powerful, that is explicitly linked to the divine. This vision gives us a question to ask of the biblical text: "Does it hurt or destroy any in God's holy mountain'? If it does, then what it 'performs' is clearly not of God, and its authority is broken."[33] In a sense, Ringe, like Ruether, is using a "canon within a canon" approach, since she makes a distinction in the text between what is revelatory and what is non-revelatory. However, many of us, each in our own way, tend to do more or less the same thing. I use this criterion to determine the revelatory status of the biblical text for me, and to evaluate material for inclusion in my reconstruction of the gospel.

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[30]Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 19.

[31]Ringe, "Standing", 556.

[32]Ibid., 557-8.

[33]Ibid., 557.

Chapter 2

Women in the Reign-of-God Movement and the Early Church

This chapter is intended to show 1) that my supposition of a first century Anna as a member of the inner circle of Jesus' disciples is not a figment of my imagination but is historically probable, and 2) to explain, at least in part, how we have arrived at a place where such a thing seems totally impossible to our twentieth-century minds. There appears to be a growing consensus among scholars that women were involved in leadership roles around Jesus and in the earliest church to a much greater extent than would appear from a cursory reading of the canonical Gospels. It has been shown, chiefly through the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, that Jesus clearly seems to have fostered a "discipleship of equals,"[34] with women as well as men being accepted as disciples and being given responsibilities such as proclaiming the reign of God and later of announcing the resurrection of Jesus. In Part I of this chapter I shall review briefly some of the evidence for the placing of women within the "inner circle" of the community that formed around Jesus: the situation presented in the Gospel that I have written, of Anna following Jesus in the inner circle of Jesus' disciples, reflects first century reality, not just twentieth century wishful thinking.

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[34] Schüssler Fiorenza first used this expression to describe the followers of Jesus in her ground-breaking book *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); see especially pages 140-154. She subsequently used it as the title of her 1993 book *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation* (New York: Crossroad).

This central role of women in the earliest church appears to have continued in the first decades post-Easter, indeed well into the early second century. The struggle over this central role is clear evidence that it did in fact continue. In Part II of this chapter I shall review briefly the evidence for the presence of women in leadership roles in the earliest church, that is, in the churches of Paul's time, in order to show that Anna's and Junia's leadership roles are consistent with historical fact.

In contrast to the prominent place of women both in the community led by Jesus and in the Pauline churches, it is clear that in the late first and second centuries the role of women in the church was being contested, and there were forces in the church trying to restrict it. This is the time when the Gospels, which show the androcentric bias of their male authors, and the deutero-Pauline and pastoral letters, which show only one (the winning) side of a debate, were being written. What happened to displace women from their central place in the "discipleship of equals"? Two of the factors that contributed to this displacement were 1) the shift from oral tradition to written text, and 2) the shift of liturgical space from the private sphere of the house church to the public space of the church meeting hall and basilica. In Part III of the chapter I shall discuss the earlier of these two factors that contributed to this downward trajectory of women's roles: the shift from oral tradition to written text. This will be discussed in relation to current work in the field of folklore studies.

During the second and third centuries the restriction of women's roles increased, as

did the polemic against the women who, in the face of such polemic, still dared to exercise leadership in the increasingly hierarchical church. Part IV of this chapter will present evidence of this continuing downward trajectory, in order to answer the question of how we got from Anna and the "discipleship of equals" of the first century to the situation today where we find it so difficult to imagine such an egalitarian partnership.

In Part V, the role played by the second factor mentioned above, the shift of liturgical space, will be discussed very briefly. In conclusion, we, as the present-day inheritors of the legacy of repression of the role of women left to us by the winners in the struggle for authority and power in the early church, have been so conditioned by the androcentrism and patriarchalism of the written records, canonical and other, that we ourselves have written women out of the earliest communities. It is essential that we understand that it took a long, hard struggle for the male winners to bring about the elimination of women's voices from the authoritative speech of the church, and that we remember the women who fought so valiantly on the side of egalitarianism and justice.

Before proceeding, I want to clarify some terminology that will be used fairly extensively in this chapter. I consider it essential to distinguish between the community that formed around the earthly Jesus and the communities that were formed after his death and resurrection, that is, between the pre- and post-Easter communities. I shall refer to the post-Easter communities as the early church (or in some cases where I am speaking of the churches of the first decades after Easter, the "earliest" church). The usual name given to

the community that formed around Jesus is "the Jesus movement," but I prefer to call this community "the reign-of-God movement." I owe this term to the work of Mary Rose D'Angelo, who originated it in a 1992 article which I found very persuasive. Her main thesis was the combination of spirit and prophetic christologies, "re-membering Jesus as a prophet within a prophetic movement, as a sharer in the spirit with its women and men prophets." One of the shifts which she asks the reader to make is to "de-centre" Jesus by shifting "the locus of the spirit from the person of Jesus to the reign-of-God movement within which he acted."[35] I found the concept of naming the movement for its proclamation rather than for the person who began it very liberating, since it allowed all the women and men who formed the movement with Jesus to be included in the "idea" of the movement. This new name allows all those women and men who exercised leadership in the movement to be re-membered for their proclamation of the good news of the reign of God, and it is the name which I shall use instead of "the Jesus movement."

1. The Role of Women in the Reign-of-God Movement

In this section of the chapter, I shall argue that women formed part of the "inner circle" of disciples around Jesus, and that this is a matter of historical fact. However, the Gospels present us with a picture of Jesus surrounded by male disciples, with women present only to serve their collective needs. One of the ways to separate the historical facts

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[35]Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Re-membering Jesus: Women, Prophecy, and Resistance in the Memory of the Early Churches." *Horizons* 19 (1992), 199.

from the androcentric bias of the male Evangelists is to examine briefly one aspect of the picture of Jesus found in the work of John Dominic Crossan, probably the best known of the current "Questers for the Historical Jesus." Although Crossan's purpose was not the support of feminist arguments regarding the egalitarianism of the reign-of-God movement, part of his picture of the historical Jesus does just that. In *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper, (1991), Crossan portrays Jesus as a radical social reformer who broke, or at least ignored, most of the boundaries of his culture, including that of gender; he performed miracles and taught, healed and fed people freely. Throughout the book Crossan argues that Jesus was a person who taught that the reign of God was for all people, women and men alike, and who followed a practice of open commensality (that is, open meal practices, sharing food with anyone and everyone) and egalitarianism

Evidence of the open commensality of Jesus' teaching and community praxis may be found in the parable of the great feast, recounted in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and in the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas. These versions almost certainly go back to an authentic parable of Jesus; Jan Lambrecht has postulated that the original version might have been something like this:

> Someone, a rather wealthy person, prepares a banquet and sends his servant to say to the invited guests that everything is ready. However, all make excuses, with the result that nobody comes. The initiator becomes furious and orders his servant to go out and bring in others,

anyone. His house must be full.[36] (Emphasis mine.)

The Matthean and Lukan redactions tend to obscure the original message of the parable, which would have been shocking for Jesus' hearers: the reign of God is for everyone and anyone, not, as the common understanding was, for the rich, the elite, the ritually pure. Jesus' praxis of open commensality issued the challenge of inclusivity to a world where the exclusivity of one's table fellowship was a social imperative. The challenge to the social fabric of the day was contained in the parable's praxis of open commensality that made no distinctions of class, wealth, purity status or gender. As Crossan says, "It is the random and open commensality of the parable's meal that is its most startling element. One could, in such a situation, have classes, sexes, ranks and grades all mixed up together. . . .Open commensality profoundly negates distinctions and hierarchies between female and male, poor and rich, Gentile and Jew."[37]

Evidence of Jesus' egalitarianism is found in Mark 10:43-45: "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant (διάκονος), and whoever wishes to be first among you must be the slave (δούλος) of all" (10:43-4). As Luise Schottroff points out, these words, servant and slave, carried with them connotations of servitude and submission to domination. In Greco-Roman culture, female slaves, male slaves and women were the ones who were expected to perform "menial" household duties such as

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[36]Jan Lambrecht, *Out of the Treasure: The Parables in the Gospel of Matthew.* (Louvain: Eerdmans, 1992), 130-131.

[37]Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 262-263.

preparing and serving meals, washing the feet of guests and attending generally to the physical needs of all males in the household. Free or freed men, even the poorest of them, did not expect to have to do this "housework." In this passage, Mark was telling the men in the community to be servants and slaves to all, that is, to consider themselves to be at the same social level as women and slaves, and to do the same work as, and even to become servants and slaves of, those whom they had always considered their inferiors.[38] Schottroff concludes that free men in the early church communities obeyed this command, and did in fact serve women and slaves.[39] Since this requirement would have been so contrary to the prevailing customs, it seems clear that the tradition must go back to the historical Jesus, otherwise it would not have survived in the post-Easter church. Like Crossan's picture of the open commensality of the reign-of-God movement, this provides us with historical evidence of egalitarianism that goes back to the movement itself.

It seems clear that both women and men were accepted in the reign-of-God movement on an equal basis, but for the elucidation of the active participation of women in leadership roles in that community we must turn to the work of recovery done by feminist scholars, principally Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. What follows is heavily indebted to her work . In order to demonstrate the active participation and leadership roles of the women around Jesus, I shall briefly discuss four stories:

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[38]Luise Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 204-211.

[39]Ibid., 209.

1) the anointing woman (Mk 14:3-9 // Mt 26:6-13 // Lk 7:36-50 // Jn 12:1-8);

2) the Syrophoenician woman (Mk 7:24-30 // Mt 15:21-28);

3) the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:5-42);

4) the women at the cross and tomb, and as witnesses of the resurrection (Mk 16:1-8 // Mt 28:1-10 // Lk 24:1-12 // Jn 20:1-18).

The Gospels are clearly literary constructs of a time several decades after the life of the earthly Jesus, and the stories of women which they contain are not accurate historical accounts of things that happened during his lifetime. In fact, as will be discussed later, the tendency of the (male) evangelists was to omit, marginalize or alter such stories wherever they could. It is all the more impressive, therefore, that so many stories of women and their role in the reign-of-God movement survived at all. The survival of these stories, then, indicates that there was a very strong oral tradition of the central place held by women in the movement, and that they could not be written out, since they reflected the reality of that earlier and formative time.

1) The Anointing Woman: A story of a woman who anoints Jesus is found in all four canonical Gospels, but the versions vary considerably from one to the other. In two of them, Jesus' feet are anointed: Luke portrays the woman as a great sinner who anoints Jesus' feet, after which she receives forgiveness for her sins, while in John, it is Mary of Bethany who anoints Jesus' feet because of her great love for him. In Mark and Matthew, it is Jesus' head that is anointed. Mark's version, which is followed very closely by

Matthew, is probably the closest to the oral traditional story, since anointing the feet of a guest would have been a commonplace event, and since the shift of the anointing by Luke and John from the head to the feet is more easily explained than the reverse. The first-century hearers of the oral story would have immediately associated it with the anointing of kings by prophets in ancient times, and would have seen the woman as standing in the line of prophets of Israel. She is an example of true discipleship, uniting faith and understanding.[40] The fact that the prophetic role of recognizing Jesus as Messiah, indeed of anointing him, was performed by a woman is clear evidence of the central role of women in the reign-of-God movement.

2) The Syrophoenician Woman: This story occurs in both Mark and Matthew; the Markan version is probably closer to the original oral traditional story.[41] The Matthean story shows signs of redaction, chiefly in the attempt to make it more acceptable to the patriarchal view of women's virtues by praising the woman for her faith, when in Mark it was her boldness and intelligence that won her the debate. In the Markan story, the woman asks for healing for her daughter and is rebuffed by a not very gracious Jesus. The woman, however, turns Jesus' argument back on him, with the result that he changes his mind because of her

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[40]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xii-xiii.

[41] Most scholars consider this story to be of post-Easter origin. However, Joanna Dewey, in "Jesus' Healings of Women: Conformity and Non-Conformity to Dominant Cultural Values as Clues for Historical Reconstruction." [*Biblical Theology Bulletin* 24 (1994): 122-131], argues convincingly for its authenticity, largely on the grounds that it is unlikely that "a story with so critical a view of Jesus would have been attributed to him." (p.129)

word, and heals her child. This is the only instance in the Gospels of anyone besting Jesus in an exchange of words, and it is done by a woman! A woman is the major "theologian and spokesperson" for the inclusion of Gentiles in the open commensality of the reign of God. In the Markan community there were presumably some who did not approve of the admission of Gentiles to the church, and this story may have been included in the Gospel to persuade them that an incident in the life of Jesus gave the warrant for their inclusion. This Gentile woman is portrayed as the foremother of all Gentile Christians, which would hardly have been the case if women had been permitted only subordinate roles in the reign-of-God movement.[42]

3) The Samaritan Woman: This story has some features in common with the story of the Syrophoenician woman, although it is almost certainly a creation of the post-Easter Johannine community, used as a means of validating the Samaritan mission. Here, the woman is Samaritan, which makes her almost as much of an outsider as a Gentile; she is not as bold as the Gentile woman, but she is perfectly willing to be engaged by Jesus in a theological discussion; her intelligence is just as quick, since she is able to understand and respond to his words; she too is responsible for bringing her people to Jesus, not this time by her wit in debate but by her missionary activity. Like the male disciples who left their fishing nets and their toll-booths, she leaves her water jug to carry the good news of the reign of God to her townsfolk. Her words are the cause of the Samaritans coming to Jesus; she becomes a witnessing disciple to those who "believed in him because of the

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[42]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 137-138.

woman's testimony," and who, because of her testimony, confess him to be "truly the saviour of the world."[43] This post-Easter story points to the central role of women both in the reign-of-God movement and in the Johannine community. If there had not been a tradition of women in Jesus' inner circle of disciples, and if the Johannine community had not had strong women leaders in their midst, they would never have thought of casting a woman as the validator of the Samaritan mission.

4) The Women at the Cross and Tomb, and Resurrection Appearances to Women:

Although the names vary slightly from one Gospel to another, these facts stand out clearly in all of the canonical Gospels: women were present at the cross; women were witnesses of the burial and of the empty tomb; women were first witnesses of the resurrection. While Judas betrayed Jesus (Mk 14:43-45//Mt 26:47-50//Lk 22:47-48//Jn 18:2-3), Peter denied him (Mk 14:66-72//Mt 26:69-75//Lk 22:55-62//Jn 18:17; 25-27), and, according to Mark (Mk 14:50//Mt 26:56) all the male disciples fled at his arrest, the women remained faithful to the end (Mk 15:40-41//Mt 27:55-56//Lk 23:49//Jn 19:25-26). Mark clearly identifies the women as disciples by the language he uses to refer to them when he tells his audience in 15:41 that they have been with Jesus all along: they followed (ἠκολούθουν) Jesus, ministered (διηκόνουν) to him, and came up to [Jerusalem] (συναναβᾶσαι) with him. The verb ἀκολουθέω ("follow") is used to identify the call and decision for discipleship (1:18): the verb διακονέω ("minister" or "serve")

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[43]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 327-328.

"summarizes the whole ministry of Jesus;"[44] the verb συναναβαίνω ("go up with") is found only here and in Acts 13:31, "where it refers to those who had encountered the resurrected Lord and become his witnesses."[45]

In the synoptic Gospels it is a group of women, one of whom is Mary Magdalene in each narrative, who discover the empty tomb, although most of the reported resurrection appearances are to the male disciples; only in Matthew (Mt 28:9-10) does the Risen Jesus appear to the women at the tomb. In the Fourth Gospel, Peter and the "beloved disciple" discover that the tomb is empty, after Mary Magdalene has seen that the stone has been rolled away. But it is to Mary that the risen Jesus first appears, after the two men, having failed to understand the significance of the empty tomb, "went to their homes" (Jn 20:10). Mary is hailed as the paradigm of discipleship: when she encounters the Risen One, she is asked whom she is seeking (ζητέω) - a verb used to describe the activities of a disciple (1:38); she recognizes Jesus when he calls her by name, as he had said "his own" would recognize him (10:4); her response to his command is that of a true disciple - she becomes the primary apostolic witness of the resurrection.[46] Speaking of Mary Magdalene, Sandra Schneiders says, "Her role is that of witness to the paschal events. She is at the foot of the cross at Jesus' death (19:25), discovers the opened tomb on Easter morning (20:1-2), and receives the first Easter christophany including the apostolic commission to announce the

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[44]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 320.

[45]Ibid., 321.

[46]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 333.

exaltation of Jesus and its salvific effects to the disciples (20:11-18). Mary Magdalene is, without any doubt, the disciple whose place in the paschal mystery is most certainly attested by all four Gospels."[47] The role of women at the cross, as discoverers of the empty tomb, and as resurrection witnesses has been down-played by the androcentric and patriarchal biases of the male Evangelists, but they could not write the women out entirely. Clearly, if there had not been a strong oral tradition of women in these roles, and if the post-Easter communities had not had a strong tradition of women in positions of authority, all traces of women's active participation would have been completely obliterated from these narratives. The fact that these traces were not erased entirely is evidence of the strength of the traditions from which they came.

In this section of the chapter, I have presented evidence for the active participation of women both in the pre-Easter reign-of-God movement and in the earliest post-Easter church communities. The very fact that the male Evangelists, in spite of their androcentric bias, retained in their texts these stories of women participating in the events that were considered by the earliest church to be crucial to faith in Jesus as the Crucified and Resurrected One, proclaims how strong the tradition of women's roles were, and cause us to regret all the other stories that did not survive the androcentrically slanted "editing" process. Only by careful feminist reconstruction can one discern the gaps and silences where these unknown women's voices may still be faintly heard.

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[47]Sandra Schneiders, "Women in the Fourth Gospel and the Role of Women in the Contemporary Church." *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 12 (1982), 43.

2. The Role of Women in the Earliest Churches

The early church was primarily an urban phenomenon, transplanted from rural Palestine to the towns and cities of the Roman Empire. In the urban culture of the first century Roman world the roles of men and women were very sharply defined. Free or freed men were free to live and work within the public sphere. The "work" of the small number of elite males, who were actually "gentlemen of leisure," consisted of the management of their estates and the accumulation of greater wealth as well as taking part in politics - the governing of the *polis*. Men of lower social status worked at a trade or in business, or as artisans or labourers, but all were free to go wherever they pleased in their town or city. Free or freed women, on the other hand, were expected to remain within the private sphere of the home. Women, under the authority of their husbands, managed the household and raised the children; in theory they did not work outside the home, and in fact women of the "upper" classes were considered shameless if they left the home except under special circumstances and with an acceptable escort. In practice, however, women of the lower social classes could and did work outside the home out of necessity, although in the textual and other evidence we have their work is largely invisible.[48] It is against this background that we must view the active participation and leadership of women in the early church.

As the gospel spread from Palestine to the Jews of the Diaspora, and from there to the Gentiles, small groups of Christians in the towns and cities of the eastern and central Mediterranean continued to meet as they had met in Palestine, in private houses, which we

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[48]See Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters*, 80-85.

have come to call house-churches. Each house-church had leaders, most often the householder(s), sometimes a married couple, but sometimes a woman of means who had been converted to Christianity and offered her house for the use of the community. Because the church was in her house, it would have seemed natural for a woman to be the leader, since women were expected to be in charge of the household. The community gathered in the house-church primarily to meet and share table fellowship, a direct continuation of the open commensality of Jesus; the meal, ἀγάπη or "love-feast," was shared by all, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, rich and poor, male and female.

In order to trace the trajectory of the role of women in the early church, we must start with some of the earliest material to which we have access, the Pauline letters. Of these, the most revealing for our purpose are the letter of Paul to the Galatians (written about 52-53 C.E.), the letter we know as 1 Corinthians (written about a year later), and the 16th chapter of his letter to the Romans (written about 58 C.E.).[49] In Galatians 3:28, Paul says that after baptism, that is, in the Christian community, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female." Whether the words "there is no male and female" are Paul's own or formed part of a pre-Pauline baptismal formula, the fact that Paul included them in this letter leads one to believe that he acknowledged, at least in theory, the principle of egalitarianism embodied in the reign-of-God movement.

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[49] Romans 16 may have been written a little earlier, if it was originally written to the church in Ephesus, and only later attached to the letter to the church in Rome.

In Romans 16, Paul refers to twenty-nine individuals, almost certainly prominent persons and leaders in the Christian community, of whom ten (37%) are women.[50] These women include Phoebe, a minister (διάκονος); Prisca, who works with Paul; and Junia, whom he names as an apostle. These women are representative of all the women who exercised authority in the early church, not only in the Pauline churches but in all the other churches established by missionaries other than Paul, who was, after all, not the only one to carry the gospel to the Gentiles. Unfortunately, we have practically no record of these other women, since Paul's letters are the only ones that have come down to us. However, it is clear from the women whom Paul names, that there were women leaders in his churches:

1) Rom 16:1: Paul recommends "Phoebe, minister (διάκονος) of the church at Cenchreae." In spite of the fact that διάκονος in this passage is translated "deacon"in the NRSV ("minister" is footnoted), it is translated as "minister" in Romans 15:16 (where Paul is referring to himself), Philippians 2:25 (where he refers to Epaphroditus), and several times in Ephesians and Colossians (where the authors are referring to other male ministers). Phoebe is clearly the leader of the church in Cenchreae, and just as much a minister in Paul's mind as the men are.

2) Rom 16:3-5: Paul greets Prisca and Aquila (in that order), and "the church in their house." If the man Aquila were the sole leader of this church, Prisca would not have been mentioned, or the church would have been said to be in "his" house. As

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[50]In Romans 16, there are 27 named and two un-named (Rufus' mother and Nereus' sister) individuals; of the ten women, eight are named (Phoebe, Prisca, Mary, Junia, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, and Julia).

it is, not only is Prisca mentioned, she is named first, a departure from custom. It is clear that she was at least co-leader with Aquila of the church in their house.

3) Rom 16: 7: Paul greets Andronicus and Junia, whom he calls "prominent among the apostles." Paul is very careful in his use of the word "apostle", using it only to refer to those who have been commissioned by the Risen One to proclaim the gospel to the world. His inclusion of Junia in this category is therefore significant of his high regard for her position as an apostle called and sent by Christ.

Clearly, then, women were exercising authority in the church in Paul's time, leading churches in their houses, proclaiming the gospel as missionaries, being recognized as apostles.

Paul's ambivalence regarding women is exemplified in the following quotations from his undisputed letters: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female." (Gal 3:28) and "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free." (1Cor 12:13). The implied acceptance of the principle of gender egalitarianism of the earlier letter is conspicuously absent in the later one. This ambivalence and apparently changeable attitude on Paul's part appears to reflect his unease with the principle of equality of the sexes, and undoubtedly was caused, at least in part, by pressures to conform to Greco-Roman societal norms of behaviour.

Paul's ambivalent attitude marks the first step in the beginning of the end of Jesus' vision of the church as the egalitarian community of the reign of God. Conformity to

Greco-Roman society (where the stereotypical female was regarded by men as innately inferior to the male) appears to have been the initial reason given for denying women their role in the ministry of the church, although in actual practice women in both church and secular society were demonstrating their ability to lead churches in their houses, manage large households, carry on their husbands' businesses in their husbands' absences, and so forth. Thus, by the time the Gospels were written in the form in which they have come down to us, and certainly by the time of the writing of the Pastoral letters, the leadership position of women in the church was seriously contested.

The works in which this change is most clearly seen are Luke-Acts and the deutero-Pauline and pastoral epistles. Luke-Acts contains more stories of women than the other Gospels; many of these stories appear paired with a story about a man. This has led some scholars to regard Luke as being favourable to women, but a closer reading reveals this not to be the case. Luke's portrayal of women, as for example in the story of Martha and Mary, reflects his motives for including their stories: at once instructional and controlling. In this story, unique to Luke (10:38-42), we are told that Martha welcomed Jesus into her home, and that she had a sister named Mary. It appears from this introduction that Martha is the head of the household, which means, if the story is really about a house-church, as many feminist scholars believe,[51] that Martha is the leader or minister of the church.

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[51]See, for example, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's interpretation of the Martha and Mary story in *But She Said*, 52-76. See also Mary Rose D'Angelo's reading of the same story in "Women in Luke-Acts: A Redactional View," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109/3 (1990): 441-461.

Martha is busy with much ministry (πολλὴν διακονίαν), while Mary sits at Jesus' feet hearing his word. Martha appeals to Jesus' male authority to have Mary help her in her ministry, but Jesus tells Martha that she is doing the wrong things, in contrast to Mary, who is doing the right thing. The instructional message is that approval is given to women who are passive and silent hearers of and believers in the word (Mary sits still and never speaks), and the controlling message is that women should not be involved in leadership activities in the church (as Martha clearly is).[52]

As Mary Rose D'Angelo points out, such stories function to instruct women (especially women of some wealth and position) in being members and financial supporters of the Christian community (as in Lk 8:3), but also function apologetically to control their active participation in its prophetic ministry. Luke's apologetic is "addressed to the women who practice and aspire to practice that prophetic ministry, and its intent is to change that practice, to restrict the participation of women to the bounds of discreet behaviour."[53]

This controlling and prescriptive[54] language is also seen clearly in the household codes of the deutero-Pauline and pastoral epistles, which were probably written during the

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[52]Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 65.

[53]Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Women in Luke-Acts," 461.

[54]Prescriptive language is that which prescribes what the author thinks someone (in this case women) ought to be doing, as opposed to descriptive language, which describes what they are actually doing, e.g "Nice little girls don't" - climb trees, play hockey with the boys, slide down bannisters, whatever, when in actual fact, lots of them are doing just that. In the New Testament the operative words are often "should" or "should not."

late decades of the first century and the early decades of the second century, not by Paul but by authors whose identities are unknown. An example of this prescriptive language is found in 1 Timothy 2: 8-12, where women are told that they should be "modest and decent, that is, chaste", they should dress simply, and they should not wear jewellery or ornate hair styles. In church only the men should pray; women should be silent, that is, they should not lead the prayers of the community; also, they may not teach or have any authority over a man. Much has been written about the household codes; however, it seems clear that if women had not been teaching and exercising prophetic ministry in the church at the time when their authors put pen to papyrus, they would not have felt it necessary to speak so vehemently against such ministry.[55]

In this section we have seen that women did indeed play central roles in the earliest church, leading churches as ministers, proclaiming the gospel as missionaries, and generally sharing with men in the work of the church. The evidence for these activities must be searched for diligently; it is in tension with the androcentrically biased prescriptive language of much of the Christian Testament. This tells us that women were exercising leadership in the face of increasing resistance from men and under increasingly oppressive conditions, and that the vision of a "discipleship of equals" was being eroded by increasing adherence by the men of the church to the norms established by the patriarchal society of the time.

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[55]See Joanna Dewey, "1 Timothy" in *the Women's Bible Commentary*, eds. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1992), 355.

3. Women's Roles in the Church and the Shift From Orality to Textuality

We have seen that women were active participants in the reign-of-God movement, and occupied leadership positions in the Pauline churches. How is it then that they appear so infrequently as active subjects in the canonical Gospels? In these texts they are portrayed as passive objects of the male gaze and male discourse, objects to be looked at, commented on and discussed by men, as, for example in Luke 7:36-50. In this story of the "woman of the city" who anoints Jesus' feet, her actions are the subject of the men's conversation, which takes place as if she were not present. They watch her and talk about what she is doing, but they never engage her in the conversation, although Jesus does finally speak to her. How is it that, like her, most of the women in the canonical Gospels are anonymous, and that they almost never speak? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to examine both the development of the early Christian community and the way in which the stories of Jesus and the reign-of-God movement were transmitted and preserved. For this purpose it is essential to have some understanding of the culture of the first century regarding orality and literacy.

In the ancient world, only a very small proportion of people would have been literate; the figure most often quoted is between two and four percent of people in the Mediterranean area.[56] In larger cities the literacy rates would have been higher, and in any social class there would have been more males than females who were literate; in the

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[56]Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 3.

lowest social classes hardly anybody would have been literate, certainly not women. The only group in which universal literacy was the norm would have been elite males, the great landowners, aristocrats, and rulers of the Empire. With these men, literacy would have been due more to a point of honour than necessity, since the ability to read and write was not an essential skill for most people in the ancient world . Walter Ong has described the first century media world as a manuscript culture with a high residual orality.[57] However, as Joanna Dewey observes, to define it in that way "is to define it from the perspective of the elite, those few who could read and write, and who ruled the Empire."[58] From the perspective of the ordinary person, the culture was to all intents and purposes an oral one. Literacy was of very little importance for the average man or woman, since everyday life proceeded without benefit of the written documents, signs, etc. that we twentieth century North Americans take for granted. On the very rare occasion when the ability to read and write was necessary, a scribe would be employed. The first century members of the reign-of-God movement in Palestine lived in an almost completely oral culture, although everyone was affected to some extent by the existence of literacy, for example, debt records were written, and they certainly affected the non-literate.

In the years immediately following Jesus' death, the stories of his teachings and sayings, his healings and exorcisms, his feedings and meal practices, his passion and death,

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[57]Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London/ New York: Methuen, 1982), 158.

[58]Joanna Dewey, "Textuality in an Oral Culture" *Semeia* 65 (1995), 39.

circulated orally in Palestine, along with the stories that told of his followers' belief in his continued presence with them. It is important to realize that there was not one "authorized" version of the Jesus story among these oral traditions (there was, after all, no one to do the "authorizing," and no concept of "authorization"), but that there were many stories circulating independently and in clusters. When we consider that Jesus undoubtedly told, for example, the same parable many times using slightly different words each time, it is easy to see why there could not be a single original version. Indeed, Werner Kelber argues that, because of what he calls this "multioriginality" and "equiprimordiality" of the proclamation of Jesus, "his proclamation was irreducible to *ipsissima verba*;" therefore, one cannot expect to work back to and reconstruct one authentic saying.[59] The diversity of the stories was also a product of the differing experiences of the storytellers and different audiences and contexts, which led to a parallel diversity of the traditions that grew up in various locations, whether villages or urban areas. If Jesus told the same story many times, and if the various storytellers repeated it many times, all using slightly different words each time, it is not hard to understand that there would have been many versions of the same story circulating at the same time. None of these versions can be said to be the "authentic" version, since authenticity as we understand it today was not a part of the oral/aural world of the first century, but is a product of our print-oriented society.[60]

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[59]Werner Kelber, "Jesus and Tradition: Words in Time, Words in Space." *Semeia* 65 (1995), 151.

[60]Kelber, "Jesus and Tradition", 151.

This applies both to the sayings of the Jesus tradition and to the traditions of the women and men who formed the reign-of-God movement. These oral traditions were probably carried from place to place by wandering teachers and healers who imitated Jesus' itinerant lifestyle as they spread the word of the reign of God. While many of these teachers would have been men, it seems reasonable to assume that, given the egalitarianism of the reign-of-God movement and the evidence of Junia and Prisca as travelling missionaries, at least some of them were women. Once the itinerant teachers had left the village, the task of re-telling the stories would have fallen in large part to the women of the village, since women are traditional story-tellers in many societies, especially among children and groups of women.[61] These women story-tellers would have told the stories as they were handed on to them; in the stories involving women as active characters, they would most likely have been active agents in the narrative rather than subjects of male discourse. A natural tendency would have been for the women storytellers to privilege the stories about women, and to keep these stories alive in the tradition. In this way, these stories would have been told and re-told by women in the same way that European folk-tales were told and re-told in the oral tradition of many cultures before they were written down by men such as the brothers Grimm. As folklorist Max Lüthi observes, "...the

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[61]Lilian Portefaix, in *Sisters Rejoice* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiskell International, 1988), 34-35, points out that children in antiquity were taught the myths of religion by women, either their mothers or their nurses.

Grimm brothers' informants were predominantly women."[62]

Folklorists, studying the origins of European folk tales in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as in contemporary cultures that are largely non-literate, have made some interesting discoveries about the oral traditional tales that form the basis of the "classical" literary folk or fairy tales that were collected and published in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One of the tales that has been studied extensively is "Little Red Riding Hood." In the original oral tale, which seems to have been quite clearly a story told by women to young girls, the young heroine of the story does not need a man to rescue her, but achieves her own rescue by using her own wits to escape the wolf.[63] A similar tale found in isolated areas of rural China, where the literacy rate is low and oral traditions are strong, has the little girl escaping unaided from the clutches of Grandaunt Tiger.[64] It was only later, when the story was written down by educated men for inclusion in a book of cautionary tales aimed at middle-class children, that the little girl was turned into a rather stupid, disobedient and helpless female who was responsible for getting herself into trouble, and who needed rescuing by a male, either her father or a passing woodsman. An

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[62]Max Lüthi, *Once Upon A Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales,* tr. By Lee Chadeayne and Paul Gottwald, (Indiana University Press, 1976), 136; quoted in Marcia Lane, *Picturing the Rose: A Way of Looking at Fairy Tales* (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1994), 29.

[63]Jack Zipes, ed., *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* (New York: Routledge, Inc., 1993), 17-23.

[64]Wolfram Eberhard, "The Story of Grandaunt Tiger," in *Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook,* ed. Alan Dundes, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 21-63.

examination of sequential editions of Grimms' *Children's and Household Tales*, shows a decrease in the number of stories in which women or girls are active protagonists and increasing marginalization and subordination of female characters.[65]

It is not difficult to draw a parallel between the oral traditions of folklore and the oral traditional telling, frequently performed by women, of the stories of Jesus and the reign-of-God movement.[66] In these stories the women were probably named, not anonymous;[67] active agents in the community, not only passive receivers of teachings and healings from Jesus; disciples, not just financial supporters; leaders, not merely followers of the (male) Twelve. These stories of women, told in their various versions by women, became part of the oral tradition that formed the basis for the mission and teaching of the early church. At some point, possibly beginning sometime around or just after the middle of the first century, the stories of Jesus and the reign-of-God movement began to be incorporated into written collections by the few literate Christians, who would almost certainly be male. It is not known whether these collections, and the Gospels that grew out of one or more of them, were initially composed in writing for oral/aural performance, or

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[65]Alison Lurie, *Don't Tell the Grown-ups: Subversive Children's Literature* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990), 20.

[66]Joanna Dewey, "From Storytelling to Written Text: The Loss of Early Christian Women's Voices," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 26 (1996), forthcoming.

[67]It has been my observation that when a woman tells the story of an incident or happening, she is more likely to use the names of the people involved, while a man telling a similar story is more likely to refer to "this guy" or "the other guy" or "the man" or "that woman" or "the wife."

"initially composed and transmitted orally and only eventually put into writing."[68] But however and whenever this shift from orality to literacy took place, it resulted in more than merely a change from spoken to written word. First, as long as Christianity was an oral movement, it took its authority from the oral stories in which everyone, women as well as men, played active parts, and which both women and men performed for their communities. Once the shift from orality to literacy began, the authority of the movement gradually shifted to the written text and to those who were literate (almost exclusively elite males), and the authority of the oral tradition and the storytellers (many of them non-literate females) began to decline.[69]

Second, when they began to write their Gospels, these relatively elite literate males had a number of oral traditional stories about Jesus from which to choose, and their choices reflected their own interests and biases, hence the greater number of male-centred stories and the pre-eminence of active male characters. Stories involving women were "domesticated" by incorporating them into male-centred texts, as, for example, the story of the Syrophoenician woman in the Gospel of Mark. As Dennis MacDonald points out, when an oral story is incorporated into a written text its "linguistic and performative status

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[68]Joanna Dewey, "The Gospel of Mark as an Oral-Aural Event: Implications for Interpretation" in *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament*, eds. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Edgar V. McKnight (Sheffield:Academic Press, 1994), 147.

[69]Dewey, "From Storytelling to Written Text."

and contextualization change."[70] The apocryphal *Acts of Paul* presents an interesting example of this; it incorporates the stories of Thecla, which many believe circulated as oral tradition before being written down by the (presumably male) author of the *Acts*. In Thecla's story, probably reflecting the tone of the oral tradition, Paul is not portrayed favourably, failing to baptize or protect her, or even to acknowledge her, but this unfavourable portrayal is largely cancelled out by enclosing it within the *Acts*, which are highly favourable to Paul. Similarly, in the story of the Syrophoenician woman in the Gospel of Mark (7:24-30), Jesus, like Paul in the *Acts*, "does not look good", but "within the larger context of Mark, Jesus' reputation is quickly restored." MacDonald speculates that, like the story of Thecla, the story of the Syrophoenician woman may be a case of a male narrator domesticating a woman's story.[71]

It seems clear that women were largely "written out" of many of the stories, marginalized and silenced by men who either simply deleted them entirely, marginalized them from their original central positions in the reign-of-God movement, or imposed a male-oriented point of view on the stories featuring women who could not be deleted or marginalized. In cases where women's participation was such that they could not be written out altogether, their roles were diminished or altered, as in the case of Mary and Martha of Bethany. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in her interpretation of their story as told in

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[70]Dennis Ronald MacDonald, "From Audita to Legenda. Oral and Written Miracle Stories," *Foundations and Facets Forum*, 2 (1986), 23.

[71]MacDonald, "From Audita to Legenda," 24.

Luke 10: 38-42, argues that Mary and Martha were well-known apostolic figures in the early church, which made it difficult for Luke to ignore them completely; he therefore told their story in such a way that they are pitted against one another, and he then used words put into the mouth of Jesus to restrict women's ministry and authority.[72]

4. The Role of Women in the Church : Second and Third Centuries

During the late second and early third centuries, the rhetoric against women who were exercising authority in the church increased; we read this new rhetoric in the letters, essays and handbooks written by a new breed of Christian male scholars. Although the church in the first and early second centuries was made up largely of poor working class people,[73] it now began to attract more well-to-do educated men from the upper classes. These men wrote scriptural commentaries, essays on moral and ethical issues, and, above all, essays on church order, essays principally concerned with how and by whom authority should be exercised. One of the earliest of these men was Tertullian, a somewhat shadowy figure from Latin North Africa whose exact dates and status within the church are not known. Writing in the late second and early third centuries, Tertullian was clearly against the idea of women having any authority in the church. In several of his writings, most notably *De Baptismo* and *De Virginibus Velandis*, he railed against women who presumed to teach, to exorcize, to baptize - all of which he regarded not so much as priestly functions

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[72]Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 52-76.

[73]See Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters*, 3-15.

but as male prerogatives. In *De Virginibus Velandis* Tertullian declared "It is not permitted to a woman to speak in church. Neither may she teach, baptize, offer, nor claim for herself any function proper to a man, least of all the sacerdotal office."[74] In *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* he writes of Christian groups, which he considers heretical, in which women "are bold enough to teach, to dispute, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures - it may be even to baptize."[75] Tertullian's work reflected and at the same time shaped the opinions of the men who were beginning to develop the hierarchy of leadership in the church. The level of the polemic against women's authority in the church is evidence that this is prescriptive language: Tertullian would not have been so exercised if women were not still baptizing, teaching and occupying a central role in the church.

A later work reflecting a similar attitude of the church toward women is the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, a third-century Syrian church order that addresses among its main areas of concern the role of the bishop as "the pivotal member of the church community" and the role of women in the community.[76] In this work two orders[77] of

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[74]Tertullian, *De Virginibus Velandis*, IX, 1, quoted in Roger Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1976), 19.

[75]Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 51.

[76]Charlotte Methuen, "Widows, Bishops and the Struggle for Authority in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 46 (1995),198.

[77]It seems clear that "widows", to whom Tertullian refers in *De Virginibus Velandis* and *De Monogamia*, and of whom the author of the *Didascalia* writes, were not simply women whose husbands had died, but were a group of women who held an official position within the church, beneath the male clergy, but above the laity. See Methuen, "Widows", especially 203-206.

women are addressed, widows and deaconesses, and it seems clear that the author is attempting to control their activities and is writing about them not in a descriptive but in a prescriptive way. Widows are to be "meek and quiet and gentle", "modest, and obedient to the bishop and deacons" (XV, iii.8), and are to "sit at home and meditate upon the Lord day and night"(XV, iii.5). "It is neither right nor necessary...that women should be teachers" (XV, iii.6), and "[t]hat a woman should baptize...we do not counsel, for it is a great transgression of the commandment, and a great peril to her who baptizes and to him who is baptized" (XV, iii.9). The tone of the admonitions against women teaching and baptizing clearly indicate that they are addressed to women who are in fact teaching and baptizing, functions which the author regards as the exclusive prerogative of the bishop.[78] As Methuen points out, "The *Didascalia* must be seen as part of an on-going struggle to establish a more hierarchical church centred on the bishop, which led to the discrediting of other forms of authority and the groups which supported them."[79]

Men like Tertullian, trained in the institutions of public life, and the author of the *Didascalia*, whom most scholars consider to have been a bishop, were, as Karen Torjesen points out, bringing to the churches "new leadership models, models that had proved effective for governing large and diverse communities. In the provinces of the Roman Empire, the clergy who collectively shared the tasks of leadership began to model

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[78]Methuen, "Widows", 200.

[79]Methuen, "Widows", 213.

themselves after city councils."[80] Since the church was now becoming part of the public sphere, where women traditionally had no right to be, such leaders thought that women should not be permitted to function in any capacity in the church.[81]

In this section, I have tried to show that in the late second and early third centuries there was an increase in the rhetoric against women having any role in the leadership of the church, and that this is evidence of two things:

1) The rhetoric itself is evidence of the continued activity of women in leadership roles in the church; otherwise none of these men would have written prescriptively about this activity.

2) The increase in the rhetoric is evidence of the serious determination on the part of the literate men of the church to completely eradicate women's leadership roles.

5. The Shift in Liturgical Space from Private to Public

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the women and men of the reign-of-God movement met in one another's houses for prayer, for "the breaking of bread", and to re-tell the stories of the Risen One, whom they were convinced was still present with them. They had no need of, nor would they probably have had access to, elaborate settings or

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[80]Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993): 155-156.

[81]Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests*, Chapter 6.

elegant surroundings for several reasons: because they were poor, because they met in small groups, and because many thought that the world as they knew it would end soon, and that Jesus would return in glory to establish God's reign on earth. As has been noted earlier, as the movement spread through the Roman Empire, its members continued to meet in house churches.

The only requirements of the house-church would have been sufficient space for the community to meet and share the meal, space for teaching inquirers, catechumens and members, and access to water for baptisms. This state of affairs seems to have lasted well into the second century, but as the size of the Christian communities grew these house churches were often modified internally to permit larger gatherings. The house at this stage had ceased to function domestically; it had become an ecclesial structure referred to as a "domus ecclesiae."[82] This form of liturgical space seems to have been the most common form during the second century, and continued to be used even after larger buildings began to be used in the third and fourth centuries. Because the domus ecclesiae was still in appearance a house, some women would have continued to exercise leadership, but they would undoubtedly have been under increasing pressure from the men to cease.

In the third century, larger buildings such as halls were acquired by the growing Christian communities to meet their needs for places of worship, instruction, baptism, etc.

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[82] L. Michael White, *Building God's House in the Roman World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990),111.

These buildings, referred to as "aulae ecclesiae,"[83] were at first relatively simple, but they soon appear to have acquired raised daises, pulpits, etc, which served to raise up the clergy and separate them from the laity. This trend continued in the fourth century with the gradual imperialization of the church: Constantine made Christianity an approved religion, and his involvement in councils and other affairs of the church led to its imperialization. One of the features of this imperialization was the building of elaborate basilicas as places of worship. The basilica form did not develop from the house church, but originated in Roman public buildings such as courts and audience halls. It was therefore discontinuous from the house church; the aula ecclesiae and the basilica were clearly located in the "public sphere," and could therefore be declared to be unsuited to women's leadership.

Conclusion

Women were active participants in the ministry of the reign-of-God movement and in the earliest church. Beginning in the late first century, the ministry of women in the early church began a downward trajectory, starting with full participation in public ministry, and ending with restriction of their activities to those which were in keeping with the customs of Roman polite society. As Christianity spread from rural Palestine to the urban Roman world, pressure to comply with the dominant Roman norms of behaviour increased. In the endeavour not to appear as a threat to public order and decency, and thereby to avoid persecution and martyrdom, the early Christians were faced with a decision: continue as a radically egalitarian society reflecting Jesus' vision of the realm of

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[83]Ibid., 127.

God, or conform to the non-egalitarian societal norms of Rome. This decision was, of course, not made in a moment, but evolved over time. Unfortunately for women (and also for all others who were not elite males), those who came to have power in the emerging church chose conformity to the mores of the time, which said that educated men were the natural rulers, and that all others, women included, were to be subordinate to them. Gradually, the freedom of women was curtailed, and the ministry of women restricted. In addition to the intent of the winners to conform to societal norms, the restrictions increasingly imposed by men on women in the church appear to be related to several developments within the church itself, of which I have discussed only two: 1) the shift, beginning during the late first century and continuing for centuries, in the method of transmission of the stories of Jesus and the reign-of-God movement from orality to textuality, which denied authority to (mostly non-literate) women and gave authority to men (who were more likely to be literate), and at the same time allowed the authors of texts (almost certainly male) to suppress the stories of women; 2) the move from the private sphere of the house church and domus ecclesiae to the public sphere of the aula ecclesiae and the basilica during the late second, the third and the fourth centuries.

It appears to me that, just as the new liturgical space (the hall or basilica) was discontinuous from the old (the house-church), so the new imperial character of Christianity was discontinuous from the discipleship of equals begun by Jesus. Many of the teachings of Jesus were still present in the teaching of the church, to be sure, but the radical character of the Jesus movement with its promise of the egalitarian reign of God

had been lost. This is immediately apparent if one compares the words of the *Didascalia* concerning the bishop with the words of the Markan Jesus as he responds to the request of James and John for the seats of power at his right and left hand in the realm of God:

> "...the Levite and high priest is the bishop. He is minister of the word and mediator; but to you a teacher, and your father after God, who begot you through the water. This is your chief and your leader, and he is your mighty king. He rules in the place of the Almighty: but let him be honoured by you as God..."[84]

> So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Humanity came not to be served but to serve . . ."

Before beginning the retelling of the story of Jesus and the reign-of-God movement, it seems appropriate to introduce Alison Cheek's letter from the apostle Junia to her imaginary friend, the teacher "Anna". This letter is reproduced here with the permission of Dr. Cheek, and is followed by my letter from Anna to Junia.

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[84] Connolly, *Didascalia Apostolorum*, Ch. XXIV, page 86.

Alison Cheek's Letter from the Apostle Junia to the Teacher Anna

Junia, an apostle of God, our Wisdom and our Strength, and of Christ Jesus, whose liberating spirit enlivens and sustains us, to Anna, the teacher, the sister revered by all the saints, and steadfast friend; grace to you, my sister, and love and joy in the calling of God that we share.

It is long since I have written and you will be thinking that your Junia has forgotten you. No indeed! Each day you are with me in my prayers, and how often memories flash back of all that we have experienced together.

Andronicus and I have been travelling constantly, and there are always letters to be written to the churches - letters that call for tact, and care to address the situations of everybody in the community, letters for which I earnestly seek the guidance of the Spirit.

But now I take the pen in my own hand to write you a personal letter, Anna. How good it feels to be able to express freely whatever comes to mind, knowing that only your eyes will see it. Julia and Marcus will carry it for me.

I hear such good things of you from Justus, whom we saw in Ephesus on our last journey. What grace of God that your father instructed you in Torah, despite the disapproval of the other rabbis, and that Jesus called you to be his disciple, and that the Spirit chose you to share your wisdom with the churches as teacher and leader.

The work goes well in Rome even though our very life remains precarious. It is good to see how the saints protect one another and build one another up. We had yet another slave baptized. He has a Roman master and we are working hard to raise the

money for his manumission. Athena, who was freed recently, took him under her wing, and gave him advice from her own experience. It is a dangerous time for Demetrius until his liberty is won, but his acceptance and freedom in the church are transforming him. He is already a brave and valued member of the community, and has begun to bring to our meetings another slave from his household, Helena, a very intelligent and impressive woman. She listens avidly to the preaching, and I think it will not be long before she too is ready for baptism. The dangers involved do not seem to deter her at all.

The good news is spreading far and wide, though not without some difficulties. We have had disturbing news from Corinth. I am worried about Paul. As you know, he is my relative and I have always been close to him. We had painful discussions before his conversion. You remember how violent he was in his opposition to the followers of Jesus. I have always thought that the calm and steady witness the Spirit enabled me to make to him at that time played its part in his final surrender. And our imprisonment together drew us even closer. But he has always been extremely sensitive to criticism, and I think he is overreacting in the Corinthian affair.

There have been slanders abroad connected with the conduct in the meetings for worship. In particular the freedom with which some of the women have expressed themselves has come under censure. Paul is behaving like a father with errant daughters. In fact I think it would have been much better had he married and had biological children of his own. He thinks of himself as the father of the communities he has founded, and you and I know how much that misses the mark of our tradition. We were both present when Jesus said to all of us: "Call no man father, for you have one father who is in heaven."

Paul sometimes forgets that we are all brothers and sisters, even those young in the faith, gifted variously by the Spirit, but one in equality, with God the only one to whom we ascribe the authority carried by fathers in other households. I can understand his concern to relieve some of the tension between the churches and the unbelieving, and certainly to lessen our persecution as subversives. But in paying so much attention to propriety he is forgetting that it is for freedom Christ has set us free. Indeed it was not for following propriety that Paul himself was whipped and stoned and imprisoned. I really cannot understand his shortsightedness.

I know that much has been revealed to Paul in the Spirit, but how different it must be not to have lived through those days with Jesus, when our horizons were stretched and we lived into a new reality. Do you remember how astonishing it was when he sent out the seventy of us? That was the first time I worked with Andronicus. How angry my father was at my unconventional behaviour, and I have to admit I was a little scared myself. But when the power flowed through me and a sick child was healed, I knew that nothing was ever going to be the same again.

Nevertheless, that dread day of Jesus' execution I do remember how numbed with grief I was. Anna, we clung together at the cross. How would I have borne it without you there, and the other sisters, too. Never will I forget the look on Mary's face. Even though Jesus had warned us and I could see it coming, I fell back into the old ways of thinking. I thought it was the end. I kept saying to myself, How can he be messiah if they have killed him. I felt they had killed <u>my</u> new found freedom and my very spirit. It was like falling into the abyss. Sometimes it seems like yesterday, and sometimes like a hundred years ago.

The journeying these days tires me. The churches are needy. The conflicts get sharper. I find I sometimes have to go off by myself and recall that day when the Risen One appeared to so many of us. The wonder of it! The astonishment! The absolute reality as he spoke to us. Then later, Andronicus and I together - our vision of the living Christ when he commissioned us to go forth and spread the good news in the power of his spirit. We still recapture the vividness of it. Every time we break the bread and say the blessing we catch each other's eye. We remember. And you remember, Anna, because you were there when he appeared to so many of us. Does it sustain you, too, in the same way? Does the power of it come into your community the way it does for us? How I need the re-charging to keep stating clearly the nature of our new life in Christ. Paul is so clear about it when it comes to circumcision, but is quite rattled by the slander in Corinth.

A merchant from Corinth came to our prayers last week and said that Paul had written to them that wives should keep silent in the churches and not be permitted to speak, but should be subordinate according to the law. If they want to know anything they must ask their husbands at home. He declared it to be a command of the Lord.

We women laughed aloud. There is no chance such customs will be adopted in this gathering. But I sensed that our brother from Corinth agreed with Paul, and I am alarmed, Anna. For we women know clearly what it means to be released from the constraints and control of the fathers. We must not be subverted into going back into bondage at the plea - "for the sake of the church". Indeed the very foundation of the church will be forsaken if we do. Sometimes the glorious freedom of the children of God feels fragile and extremely vulnerable. Not from persecution. The blood of the martyrs sustains us. But from those

of our brothers who have never been slaves and who do not identify with their sisters. They do not see the oppressiveness of the structures. They do not really understand the inclusiveness that brought the Saviour to his death, and which his rising vindicates.

Anna, you are a teacher, and you have gathered together so many of the teachings of Jesus and the stories about him. Even though his spirit guides us, I think we need to have them in writing before they are forgotten or all these letters distort them.

Yet I cannot despair, for the power of Jesus, our Wisdom, is manifest every day, not only in signs and wonders, and they are many, but in the hard work of love and forgiveness as we speak the truth to each other, and remember all that we have seen and done.

Daily we hand on the tradition - that Christ called into God's realm slaves, gentiles, and outcasts, the poor - women and men of every sector of society. The Romans put him to death on a cross, but death did not hold him. He was raised on the third day and appeared to Mary of Magdala and our other sisters, then to Peter and to some other disciples. Then he appeared to a large gathering, and to all the apostles, and sent us forth in the power of the Spirit to bring the good news of God's gracious goodness to all without exception, that we are all one in Christ Jesus. What work we have ahead of us to make that concrete in the world in justice, power and love!

Peace be with you, my Anna. Write down the sayings and send them to us. And grace and joy abide with you in the fullness of the Spirit, until the things that are cast down are raised up, and we all live as friends of God in the age that is to come. May it come soon!

Letter from Anna the Teacher to Junia the Apostle

To Junia, my very dear friend and colleague in Christ Jesus in the city of Rome, greetings, love and peace to you from Anna in the city of Antioch.

It was so good to receive your letter, which Julia and Marcus carried safely to me from Rome. I too experience a feeling of great relief at being able to write my thoughts without having to examine them first for correctness and tact, knowing that only the eyes of my dearest friend will read them. We are well here in Antioch, and the churches continue to grow in numbers. Those of us who teach are kept very busy instructing the new followers in preparation for their baptism, and continuing the education of all the sisters and brothers in the Way of Christ. I continue to thank God daily for my father and mother, who, by agreeing that my father should teach me to read and write and to study Torah, made it possible for me to better serve Jesus our Wisdom as a teacher, although I know of course that reading and writing are not necessary in order to be a good teacher -- we have many who cannot read and write but who are truly gifted teachers.

I think often of my childhood in Capernaum - how unhappy and miserable I was before you came into my narrow existence, my life almost completely restricted to the home of my mother and father, since the infirmity that afflicted my back made it unthinkable for me to go out much in public. Then you came on that errand for your mother, which I firmly believe was an act of God, and after that my life was a thousand times brighter. In fact, I

believe that it was your eloquent pleading that persuaded my mother that my father should continue teaching me, a thing she had not agreed with at all. So at the time when other girls were being prepared for marriage, I was studying Torah with my rabbi father, for no one could think of marriage for a cripple like me.

I remember so clearly, although it is more than twenty-five years now, the day when you persuaded me to go with you to the synagogue. You had heard about this incredible teacher from Nazareth who healed people of all kinds of illnesses, and you wanted me to see him. How I argued with you! I didn't want to go to the synagogue to be stared at by all the people, seeing them draw back from me in loathing and fear of my wretched bent back, the infirmity that made me look as if I were forty years old instead of merely twenty! But you would not be denied, and in the end I had to give in - you know I never could refuse you anything. And that day changed my life - changed both of our lives - forever. Jesus healed my back, but he did more than that - he healed my spirit, took away the bitterness and pain, and in their place he put love and peace. But I don't need to tell you how it was - you were there and saw it all.

After that, nothing was ever the same again. When I left my home forever to follow Jesus, my whole family was, as you know, terribly angry at my shameless behaviour, especially my father and brothers. And through the grace of God, you also followed Jesus, leaving behind everyone and everything you held dear, and having to bear the anger of your family. But neither of us has ever regretted the choice we made - of that I am very sure.

Your idea that I should write down the stories and teachings of Jesus struck a very responsive chord in my heart. You will perhaps not be surprised to know that I have been thinking of doing this for some time - you and I were always able to read each other's minds! In fact, I have already made a start by writing about Jesus' healings, and I have also begun to write the story of his crucifixion and death. That part will be very difficult, for, like you, I remember only too well the pain of that dreadful time, but I would like to try to explain for those who come after us what it meant for those of us who saw it all happen.

I have often wished that I had been with Jesus from the time of his baptism, at the very beginning of his ministry, and not only because it would have been wonderful to be with him for a longer time. I think that being there to see and hear what happened then would make it easier for me to understand and to explain to others everything that happened later. So many people who had been convinced that Jesus was the Messiah foretold by the Scriptures lost their faith when he was crucified; they felt that if he had been the Messiah, God would have rescued him from that shameful death. Many believed that he was a prophet of Divine Wisdom, put to death as John the Baptizer and so many others before him had been. But like you and many others, I believe that when he was baptized, Jesus was filled with the Wisdom of God, so that he became at the same time both human, like us, and divine, like God. Mary of Magdala and I have exchanged letters several times since she has been in Edessa, and she has said much the same thing: at first she believed that Jesus was a prophet of Divine Wisdom, but now she is convinced that he was the

embodiment of Wisdom herself.

I shall try to write the story of Jesus and the community that formed around him, and to relate the terrible events of his crucifixion and death as best I can. As for the story of his resurrection, I can only endeavour to describe and explain it to the best of my belief, and as I teach it to all who come to me for understanding. I promise to send my attempts at telling the story to you as soon as they are completed, and you must promise to give me your honest opinion about them and your memories also, so that we can improve the story together.

We in Antioch have heard something of this controversy between Paul and the church in Corinth, and our feelings about the way Paul is handling this crisis are the same as yours. You know Paul better than anyone, and I feel certain that he listens to your advice, perhaps more than he would admit. I pray that your witness may bring your fiery relative to recall the heart of the message that Jesus brought to us about the reign of God - that we are all equal, women and men, slave and free, Jew and Gentile, and that we are all called to serve God and each other as equal disciples in the inclusive and egalitarian community that is the Church of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God.

I can scarcely believe that Paul would dare to say that women should play only a subordinate role after all these years during which we have been working together in a spirit of equality and freedom. You must try to help him to understand that he is violating

the way of the very One who called him to be the apostle to the Gentiles. To be sure, I have noticed that when Paul preaches the good news of Jesus and the reign of God, he stresses the cross and resurrection, but rarely speaks of the teachings of Jesus, with which we who followed him during his earthly life are so familiar. Maybe he needs to hear the stories and the sayings as we remember them, in order to gain some sense of perspective for his mind, which I know is very occupied with the controversy with Peter and James about the way in which Gentiles are to be accepted into the church. When I finish writing all the stories down, maybe Paul would be willing to read them, and that might help him to understand a little better how Jesus viewed the equality of all people.

Peace be with you, my dear Junia. I know that you will be sustained by the Spirit in all the trials and persecutions that you must face. I pray always for your safety and well-being, in the sure and certain knowledge that Christ whom you love with your whole heart and preach so eloquently will surround you with his love all the days of your life. Greet Andronicus and all the sisters and brothers in Rome for me. I would dearly love to see you again someday, and I pray God will make that possible. Meanwhile, until we meet again, in this world or in the glory of the age that is to come, I send you my love and ask God's blessing upon you.

Chapter 3

The Gospel According to Anna[85]

In those days Jesus went about in Galilee, proclaiming the good news of the reign of God and healing many who were sick or possessed by demons. And he came to Capernaum, where there was a young woman named Anna, who is the same one who is writing this account. Now Anna had been afflicted from birth with a spirit of infirmity that caused her back to grow more and more crooked with each passing year, so that by the age of twelve, she was unable to stand upright. Since no man would wish to marry one so afflicted, she remained in the house of her father and mother; at the time of this account she had reached the age of twenty. The one consolation of her life was her great friend Junia; the two women loved each other dearly.

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[85]Because I did not want to interrupt the narrative by the use of footnotes, I wish at this time to acknowledge the following scholarly works, to which I am heavily indebted: John Dominic Crossan's *The Historical Jesus*; Malina and Rohrbaugh's *Social Sciences Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's works in general, and in particular *In Memory of Her; But She Said;* and *Jesus, Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*; William Herzog's *Parables as Subversive Speech* (particularly for the interpretation of the parable of the workers in the vineyard); Bruce Chilton's *A Feast of Meanings* (which I used in part for the story of the "last supper"). Details of these and other works consulted will be found in the Bibliography.

With the exception of biblical quotations, the only occasion where I have used a direct quote (abbreviated slightly) occurs on page 95; it is the greeting of the risen Jesus to Mary of Magdala, which is from a deuterocanonical Coptic text of the fourth century. The text is cited on page 193 of Carla Ricci's *Mary Magdalene and Many Others*, and is taken from *Manichaean Manuscripts in the Chester Beatty Collection*, C.R.C. Allberry (ed.), *A Manichaean Psalm-Book* (Stuttgart, 1938), vol II, p. 187. Quotations from the canonical Gospels, where used, are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

On the day when Jesus came to Capernaum, Junia persuaded Anna to come with her to the synagogue where Jesus was teaching. "For", she said, "this Jesus has healed many who were afflicted with demons, and restored sight to the blind, and opened the ears of the deaf. If we go to see him, I know that he will be able to heal your back." Now Anna had been examined by many healers and physicians when she was a child, and they had called her condition hopeless, since it was either caused by a demon or sent by God as a punishment for the sins of her parents. Her father had even travelled to Jerusalem and arranged for sacrifices to be offered in the temple so that she might be healed, but she became no better, only grew steadily worse. Her infirmity had caused both Anna and her whole family to be shamed in the eyes of the community, who were certain that her parents must have sinned greatly for such a punishment to have been visited upon them. So Anna did not want to go to the synagogue, not even to see this new healer, since she knew that the people feared and were repelled by her infirmity. But Junia at last persuaded Anna to come with her, and they went together to the synagogue, Junia leading Anna by the hand, since she could not stand upright, and could see only the ground beneath her feet.

And they came to where Jesus was teaching, but Anna hung back, because she hated to be an object of fear and revulsion. But Jesus saw her, and as he looked on her with pity and love, she felt a stirring in her back, as if someone were pulling her upright. And as her back straightened and her head was raised, she found herself looking into the eyes of Jesus. In that moment she felt that God's love was flooding into her body, and it was not until then that she suddenly realized that her back was now straight. And she praised God

for this miracle, and Junia wept for joy to see her friend healed. And Anna said, "What can I do to thank God for this great miracle?" And Jesus answered her, "Anna, it is because of Junia's faith that you have been made well. If you would give thanks to God, come, follow me, and proclaim the good news of the reign of God, which is for all people." And immediately they both left their homes and families and went with him.

As they were walking along the way, following Jesus with the other women and men who were his disciples, Anna and Junia talked about what Jesus had done. They were so excited and happy that they could not stop talking about the miracle of Anna's straight back. They agreed that this miracle was more than the healing of Anna's back alone; it was also the healing of her mind and spirit, which had been made bitter by the many years of suffering which she had undergone. The miracle was also the return of Anna to the community, from which she had been isolated by her infirmity nearly all of her life, thus having no value in their eyes or in her own. And it marked not only the restoration of a right relationship with the community, but also the restoration of a right relationship with God, since she had felt that because it made her imperfect and blemished, her infirmity had cut her off from the source of divine grace. So now she was totally healed, body, mind and spirit, and she felt like dancing and singing as she and Junia walked the dusty roads of Galilee, following Jesus. She felt a freedom, not only from pain and deformity, but a freedom to look around at the beauty of the earth, a freedom to live as a whole person, and from that day to this she has never stopped praising God for the mercies poured out on her.

While the disciples were with Jesus in Galilee, he healed countless numbers of sick people, too many for all their stories to be told in one book. Aside from my own story, which I have already told, the healing that stands out most in my memory also took place in my own town of Capernaum. In fact, there were two unbelievable healings that same day, and it all happened in this way.

Jesus had been away from Capernaum for several days, and people were watching for him to return, because Esther, the twelve-year-old daughter of Hannah and Jairus, was very ill, and it appeared that she was about to die. So when someone saw Jesus coming along the road, followed by his disciples and the crowd that was always with him, they ran and told Jairus. Now Jairus was a leader of the synagogue, and a man of great dignity, but in his grief he cast dignity aside, running up to Jesus, weeping and begging him to heal Esther. Jesus turned to go with him, and just then occurred the healing that I remember so well.

Among the crowd milling around Jesus was Abigail, a woman whom I had known since I was a child. Like my family, she also was isolated from the community, and was rarely seen in public because of a terrible infirmity. She had suffered from a flow of blood for twelve years, and of course during all that time everyone had thought of her as being unclean, so she had to be very careful not to touch any of the men because they would consider themselves to be defiled . She had at one time had more money than most in Capernaum, for she was the widow of Amos, a wealthy merchant, who died when their only child, their daughter Sarah, was an infant. She had spent all her money on physicians,

but to no avail, since no one could heal her.

Abigail told me later all that happened that day, for, although I was present at the time, I did not realize what was taking place. When she heard that Jesus was coming, she felt a great surge of hope in her heart, so she determined to go to him for help, even though it meant breaking all of the Pharisees' purity rules. She was so desperate and in such pain of body and soul that she was past caring if she were condemned for her actions. So, pale and ill, her head and most of her face concealed by her veil, Abigail crept up behind Jesus, thinking, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." None of the men recognized her in the crowd - if they had, there would have been an outcry. Amazed at her own temerity, she stretched out her hand and touched his robe. Immediately she felt a great wave of healing and strength well up inside her, and she knew instantly that the flow of blood had stopped and she was restored to health. She said afterwards that it was like being born anew. Jesus immediately turned around and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" We disciples couldn't understand why he was asking - there was such a crowd that a dozen must have brushed against him. But Abigail knew what he meant, and she came forward and knelt at his feet, saying, "I touched you, sir, because I knew you could heal my body and make me whole again. I am sorry if I seemed bold, but I was desperate." Then Jesus said, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; you are already healed of your disease. Walk with me to Jairus' house and tell me your story, then come, follow me." And Abigail did as he said, and as they talked she felt that her spirit was healed as well as her body, and at that moment she became one of Jesus' disciples and one of my best friends.

When they reached Jairus' house they were told that Esther had died, but Jesus said to Hannah and Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe", and then he went into the house, taking with him only Hannah and Jairus, Peter, Mary of Magdala and Abigail. Later on, Abigail told me all that happened next; Jesus went into the room where Esther was lying as still as death, not moving or even breathing. He took her hand in both of his, even though other men would never have risked defilement by touching a dead body. Then he said to her, "Little girl, arise!", and immediately Esther opened her eyes and sat up as if she had only been asleep. Hannah and Jairus were overcome with joy to have their daughter restored to them, and the people outside, when they heard what had happened, were utterly astonished. So on that single day, Abigail was healed and became a disciple, and Esther was raised from the dead, and later, when she was a little older, she joined her mother and father as disciples, not following Jesus as he travelled about the countryside, but welcoming him and all of us into their home when we were in Capernaum.

We travelled to many places in Galilee with Jesus, and we disciples listened avidly to his words as he taught the crowds who followed him, and watched in awe as he healed the sick and cast out demons and unclean spirits. Most of the people who came to see Jesus as we travelled with him through Galilee were terribly poor, and hardly ever had enough to eat. Sometimes when I looked into their tired faces, it was all I could do not to weep for them, they looked so worn out and hopeless. Often, at the end of the day, he seemed to know that many didn't have the strength to walk back to their homes, and that in any case there would be very little food waiting for them when they got there. So he would have them sit

down on the grass and he would ask for whatever food they had with them. Someone always had some bread and a few pieces of fish, and of course we who were his closest followers would have brought something with us, which we would bring out. Jesus would put the food on a rock, and he would give thanks to God for it, break it into pieces and distribute it to the crowd. Somehow, more food always seemed to materialize as he was doing this - I never could explain how it happened, but there always seemed to be plenty of food, more than enough for all to be fed. It was as if he nourished them from within himself, just as a mother feeds her child.

With the other disciples, Junia, Abigail and I followed Jesus as he journeyed through Galilee. We disciples shared all things in common, and all shared in the work of the reign of God, each according to her or his abilities and gifts. All of us, women and men alike, cared for the children who were among us, prepared and served the food we ate, healed the sick, comforted the afflicted and proclaimed the good news of the reign of God to all who would listen. Some of the men grumbled because they had to do work which they had always considered to be the work of women, and because Jesus treated the women disciples as if we were the equal of the men. The men thought that they should be considered to be first ahead of the women, and that they should be the ones to sit in the seats of power in the new reign of God. One day some of the men were talking about this, and Jesus heard them and rebuked them, saying, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." And he took a little child, Judith's daughter Deborah, and set her in the midst of the men and said to them, "This child is the most lowly and humble and

powerless of all of God's people; she has no claim to greatness, since all are considered greater than she. She represents the lowest of the lowly. But I tell you, unless you change and become like this child, you will never know the reign of God. The man who willingly gives up his power and position and makes himself lowly is the greatest in the reign of God. So do not think that you are of higher standing than the women are, or that those who are born to a higher place are greater than the lowly, because in the reign of God the last shall be first and the first shall be last." And after that, the men stopped complaining aloud, although we women had to keep reminding them constantly of Jesus' words, that among the disciples of Jesus, women and men, there were no greater or lesser, but that all were equal.

When we were alone with Jesus and away from the crowds who constantly sought him out, he taught us many things concerning the reign of God. When we asked Jesus to describe the reign of God, his answers were always in parables, stories that started with "The reign of God is like...", and then compared it to something from our everyday lives, something we could understand. The one that I liked best was the one that compared God to a bakerwoman, perhaps because I often had the job of baking the bread for all of us when we were at home in Capernaum. Jesus said, "The reign of God is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." I could picture God with her sleeves rolled up, sprinkling a tiny bit of the yeast of her reign into each of us, then kneading all together so that the spirit of her reign was spread through all the world, then baking us in the fire of life, and at the end taking from the oven all the

beautiful nations made into one reign, where all people would love God and each other as God loves us.

One day when Jesus was teaching the crowds, he said, "The reign of God is like a wealthy woman who invited her friends to a banquet. When the day came, she sent her servant to tell those whom she had invited that all was in readiness, but they all began to make excuses, and no one came. The woman was disappointed and angry, so she sent the servant out to bring in people from the street, anyone at all. She wanted her house to be full." A man in the crowd said, "No one would want just *anyone* at their table! Men don't eat with women, or clean people with lepers, or the wealthy with beggars, or the righteous with sinners!" But Jesus answered him, saying, "In God's reign, all are equal. God's love includes everyone, so in God's sight there are no male or female, rich or poor, pure or impure." The man went away shaking his head, because he could not accept this new teaching. But Jesus not only taught us this new way of being with people, he practised it himself, and daily we ate with all kinds of people - unclean men like tax-collectors and lepers, women who were alone and considered by many to be sinners - everyone was welcomed into the community of his table. The religious authorities were shocked at the way Jesus ate with people of all sorts and conditions; the Pharisees were especially enraged by his violating the boundaries of their ritual purity laws, which they wanted all of us to follow. But for Jesus, this was all part of the joy of the reign of God.

When some of the disciples questioned him about where God's reign was and when it

would come to pass, Jesus said it had already come, and was within us and among us already. Gradually we came to understand that the reign of God was not just something that we could hope for in the future, but something that we could accomplish in the present, if we only had faith and followed his teachings. Some of the people who came to listen to his words were merely curious, and did not stay to follow Jesus, but many others believed in his words, and either stayed in their own places to teach others there, or followed him on the way, as he commanded them, and as each was able..

Some of the parables that Jesus told were not about the reign of God, but were about our life here in the villages of Galilee. They caused much discussion and even dispute among the people who heard them, and sometimes I wondered why he told them, since they were not about the things of God. But I came to realize that he was trying to make the people understand that their lives were not meant to be so desperately hard, that God did not intend that they should suffer poverty and debt, but that these things were caused by the rulers, who were very wealthy, and who took their lands and the produce they raised by their hard work. I remember one such parable particularly, because it made the rulers very angry. Jesus told it this way:

"A landowner went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five

o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received a denarius. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or is your eye evil because I am good?' "

All of us who heard the parable argued about it for a long time, but we came to see that the landowner was treating the labourers unjustly. His vineyard could only have been made by taking the lands of others from them, which reduced them to poverty and forced them to beg for work, for which they received a wage too small to keep them alive. When the landowner referred to the land as his own, he was speaking blasphemy, because our scriptures tell us that all the land belongs only to God, and we are but the stewards of it.

The landowner shamed the last workers by forcing them admit in front of everyone in the

marketplace that no one had wanted to hire them, and by "giving" them a denarius rather than "paying" them for their work, which made them appear like beggars. He then shamed the first workers by telling them before everyone that their work was worth no more than an hour's labour. And when they protested, he turned their protests into condemnation of their fellow workers; so dividing them, he conquered them. Also, the one who protested would know that he would not be hired again, and the others would not dare to raise their voices to protest injustice, for fear of losing what little chance they had of earning a living. When we had discussed these things, we realized that poverty was caused by the greed of those in power, not by the will of God, and we began to consider how all might work together to lessen oppression.

This kind of teaching caused those in positions of power over the people to be very angry, and to look for ways to be rid of Jesus. They wanted things to continue as they were, with themselves receiving the greatest benefits from the system under which we were forced to live. But many of the people of the land, for whom it was a struggle just to stay alive, accepted Jesus' words, and began to change their lives by helping one another, forgiving one another's debts, and uniting within their villages to look after those who were suffering the greatest hardships. The rulers accused Jesus of stirring the people to revolution and rebellion, but what he was really doing was opening their minds and hearts to the love of God, and showing them how they could return God's love by loving and taking care of their neighbours. When we disciples heard the angry words of those in authority, we were afraid for our beloved teacher, but never for a moment did we imagine what would happen

to him such a short time later.

The days slipped by like beads on a string, each one the same as those before, and yet each one different. We listened to Jesus teaching the people who came to listen, and sometimes we understood his teachings clearly, while sometimes we totally failed to comprehend his message. At times like these, we turned to Mary of Magdala for explanations. I did not know Mary very well, and I was greatly in awe of her, because she had such authority about her, and she was very close to Jesus, so that made her a special person in my eyes. The women disciples looked to Mary for leadership, and considered her to be chief among all the followers of Jesus, although the men thought that Peter was the leader, mostly because he was always first to step forward and speak, often without thinking clearly what he was about to say. Mary was not like Peter; she was quiet and did not speak much, but when she did speak, what she said was worth listening to and remembering.

One evening we women disciples were gathered at Abigail's home in Capernaum, while the men were at the home of Peter, where Jesus had that day healed many who were sick, including Naomi, the mother of Peter's wife Sarah; Naomi had been very ill with a fever. We had many questions in our minds about Jesus, questions that we hesitated to ask in front of the men, because they seemed always to talk as if they understood everything, and they looked down on us women as if we had weaker minds than they had. So we began asking Mary of Magdala about the things we did not understand. Mary told us the story about Jesus' baptism by John the Baptizer, and about how the Spirit of God seemed to

come upon him at that moment, setting him apart from other people, and anointing him for God's service. No one knew much about his life before that time, except that he was a person of the land, like us, an artisan who had lived in Nazareth. But after his baptism by John, Mary said, he seemed to be filled with the Spirit of God, and began going about the countryside proclaiming, "The time is fulfilled, and the reign of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the good news."

Some of us asked who Mary thought Jesus might be, and she asked in return, "Who do you think that he is?" Some said they thought he might be Elijah, while others thought he was the prophet like Moses who was to come to us before the end time, and still others thought he was the Messiah. A few thought he was John the Baptizer raised from the dead; shortly after Jesus' baptism, everyone had been horrified to learn that Herod had arrested and executed John. After all had offered their opinions, we looked to Mary for her thoughts. Mary said, "I think that John was a prophet of Divine Wisdom, one sent by God to be the fore-runner of God's Anointed One, and that Jesus was filled with God's holy spirit and became the embodiment of Divine Wisdom herself." We were all amazed, since we had never dared to hope for so much, and we asked Mary to explain what she meant.

"I am not sure how to explain to you what I have been thinking, because I am not really clear about it in my own mind" Mary began, "but you know that it is written that Wisdom was a wise woman, the first created of God; but then she was said to have participated in

creation. She was called a teacher and bringer of life to all who hear her words, and a mediator between God and humanity. Now it is said that Wisdom is the embodiment of God's presence in the lives of God's chosen people Israel. In every generation she becomes embodied in the righteous, who then become her prophets and are closely related to the Divine. Wisdom came to earth and dwelt for a time in the holy city of God, but she found no home, and so she returned to Heaven. Like Divine Wisdom, Jesus also has found no home. Do you remember the man who said to him, 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Humanity has nowhere to lay his head.' I believe that was Divine Wisdom speaking."

Some of the women thought that Mary was imagining things; I did not know what to think, but I pondered these things in my heart for a long time, recalling what my father had taught me about Wisdom. Then one day something else happened to make me think about it again. Some people in the crowd asked Jesus about who John was, and also if he, Jesus, was the Messiah. Jesus answered, "John was a prophet, yes, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written:

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,

who will prepare your way for you.'

If you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another.

'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;

we wailed, and you did not mourn.'

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they said, 'He has a demon'. The Son of Humanity came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!' Yet Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." And then he looked at the worn, tired faces of the crowd and said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." As he spoke, I was immediately reminded of the words of the book of the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira, that my father had taught me, describing Wisdom's yoke as requiring little labour and yielding great serenity, and I knew that I had even more thinking to do in order to decide for myself who our Teacher really was.

One day while we were in a village just outside Sepphoris, Jesus was in the house of some of his followers; he had been teaching the people, and he was tired and wanted to get away from the crowds for a little while. Only a few of us were with him in the house, when suddenly a woman whom we did not know came in, uninvited. I confess that I was a little shocked, because she was a Gentile, a Syrophoenician, and it seemed such a strange thing for her to do. She went directly to Jesus and, kneeling before him, she said, "Sir, my little daughter Artemisia is ill at home, possessed by an unclean spirit. I beg you to cast out the demon and heal her!" But Jesus said, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." I was very troubled by his words, because it

seemed that Jesus was saying that the reign of God was only for us Jews, but not for Gentiles, and yet I had begun to believe that it was for everyone, not just us. Besides, to imply that the child was no better than a dog was not very nice. But the woman did not get angry, but said quietly, "Sir, even the puppies under the table eat the children's crumbs." Jesus looked shocked, and then uncomfortable, and then his face softened; "For your word, you may go in peace," he said. "The demon has left Artemisia, and she is healed." The men were astounded - Jesus had spoken to a Gentile woman, had healed her child, and had accepted what was almost a rebuke from her! The woman, whose name, I later learned, was Justa, left rejoicing and praising God, and Jesus said, "This woman's words have shown me that the reign of God is surely for all, not only for Israel but also for all the nations. What she has said will be remembered by the Gentiles in ages to come, and she will be praised by them as an agent in their salvation!".

After we had been with Jesus for some time, he sent seventy of us in pairs out into the surrounding countryside to heal the sick and preach the good news of the reign of God. Junia and Andronicus went together to the region around Chorazin, while Malchus and I were sent to Cana. Despite the fact that we were afraid at first to act on our own, we were able to heal many sick people and cast out many demons. We stayed in the houses of people who accepted our healings and teachings, and returned after a few weeks greatly excited at all that we had accomplished. In this way the words of Jesus were spread throughout the whole of Galilee. But the scribes and Pharisees and elders of the people were becoming more and more angry with Jesus because, as he was gaining authority as a

healer and teacher in the eyes of the people, he was taking honour from them and they felt that they were losing their authority and power over the people. So they began to plan how they could rid themselves of him without arousing the people to anger and rebellion, and we disciples became more worried about his safety than ever, although even then we did not dream that things would end as they did.

In the spring, as the time for Passover was approaching, Jesus told us that he must go up to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast. All of us tried to dissuade him, because we knew that all the rulers were looking for a way to arrest him and kill him. But Jesus said to us, "I have been sent into the world to do the will of God, to bring the light that is the peace, justice and love of God to all people. If I try to save my life by hiding the light of the reign of God in Galilee, I will not be doing the will of the one who sent me to proclaim the good news to all who live in the dark. But if I take the light to Jerusalem and place it high on God's holy hill, I will be doing what I have been sent to do, for even so did the prophets of old, carrying the word of God to the place where those in authority dwelt. If the result of my doing the will of God is that I die, then God's will be done."

Many of the our number were afraid to go up to Jerusalem, risking imprisonment or death, and they turned away and went back to their homes. And some, torn between remaining with their families and following Jesus, hesitated and said, "Lord, I will follow you, but I cannot come right now". And Jesus said to them, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the reign of God." But the rest of us set out on the way with

Jesus, although many of us feared for his life and our own.

As we set out on the way to Jerusalem, Junia, Abigail and I were walking together along the road. I was thinking about my life, how dramatically it had changed, and how I would never have dreamed that I would one day be going to the Holy City. Then we caught up with some of the other disciples who had been ahead of us, and Junia and I found ourselves walking with Mary of Magdala. Mary asked us what we were thinking about on this long journey, and Junia said, "I have been thinking about what Jesus has been doing in Galilee, and about the enmity that the rulers have for him, and I have been trying to understand why he feels that he must go to Jerusalem, where he will be in so much danger, where he must face those whose power is much greater than that of the leaders in Galilee. What will happen to his work if he is imprisoned, or even killed? Would it not be better for him to stay in Galilee and preserve his life so that he can go on teaching the people?"

And Mary said, "I know, Junia, that often it is hard for us to understand these things; let me tell you how I try to make sense of them. You know how poor and oppressed the people in the countryside are, and you can see that the greatest cause of their poverty is the large portion of the harvest that must go to the Chief Priests and others in the Temple, and more to the Romans and those like the Herodians who govern for the Romans. According to the Law, this should not be so, for our God is a God of justice and love, and it is not God's wish to see the people suffer such oppression and poverty. Remember the story of the workers in the vineyard? Jesus has brought the word of God to the people, showing

them how they can help each other in these hard times, rather than each family thinking and struggling only for their own family. This is what Jesus meant when he answered the scribe who asked him about the greatest commandment. You remember, Jesus said that the greatest of God's commandments is to love God with everything that is in us, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. If everyone did that, the reign of God would be visible among us. The word of God has spread through most of Galilee, and many people truly believe and are trying to live according to that word. But others, who do not want things to change, refuse to believe, and they fear the changes they see taking place among the people. They are afraid that they will lose their power over the people, and also lose the money they make from the people under the system as it is.

"The priests don't want someone else to be able to heal the sick and to cast out demons, because then people won't come to them for healing, and they will lose both honour and money. The landowners don't want the people to help one another, because then there will be fewer farms lost through debt for them to snatch up, fewer slaves for them to acquire, and fewer day-labourers for them to hire for a few coins when they need them. The Romans and the Herodians don't want the people to be reminded of how God freed them from bondage in Egypt and brought them to this land, because they are afraid that the people, remembering that God loves them and wishes them to be free, will rise up against their oppressors. So, you see, the path that Jesus is taking is a dangerous one, although you would not think that teaching people about God would be dangerous work. But in the eyes of those whose power comes from their oppression of the people, anyone who

awakens the people to realize the injustice of their lives is seen as a threat, and soon becomes a target for their evil plans."

I could not help interrupting Mary, exclaiming, "All the more reason not to go to Jerusalem!" But Mary replied, "Do you remember what Jesus said about not turning back once you have put your hand to the plow? Jesus feels that he has been called by God to bring God's reign to all the people of Israel, not only to the people in Galilee, and many people who would not otherwise hear his words about God's reign will be in Jerusalem for the festival. When God said, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?', Jesus answered 'Here am I, Lord, send me', just as the prophet Isaiah did long ago. Jesus has put his hand to the plow, and he has always known that he must not turn back. As has he said, the one who would bring change to Israel, bringing peace and justice to the lives of the people and sanctifying the worship that we offer to God, must take the message of God's reign to the seat of all the power in the land. He knows the danger, but he also knows what God wants him to do, and so he will put himself in God's hands, knowing that whatever happens, God will be with him."

And so we came up to Jerusalem in the afternoon of the second day of the week. There was by this time a small crowd of people with Jesus, people who had joined us as we journeyed, as well as those of the disciples who had followed him all the way from Galilee. As we drew near, Jesus stopped and looked ahead to the city with a look of great sadness, and said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are

sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" We were puzzled by this, but we were afraid to ask him what it meant. But later, I thought again of Divine Wisdom's prophets, and of how they were treated harshly by the people who should have been the first to accept them, and I remembered Mary's words about Jesus and Wisdom.

We entered Jerusalem through the Damascus Gate that afternoon; I could hardly believe that I was actually in the City of Zion, the place that I had heard and read about since I was a child, but never thought to see. In spite of all my worries and concerns, I could not help being excited at the thought of actually being there. How grand it looked to my eyes - the large buildings, the walled houses of the wealthy, and everywhere huge crowds jostling each other in the narrow streets. We went to the Temple Mount, and Junia and I were awestruck by the size and grandeur of the buildings, with their walls of enormous stones, and the spacious steps leading up to the great triple gates, standing open in the bright sunlight. We did not stay in Jerusalem, however, partly because it was so crowded for the festival, but more because there were friends from Galilee in Bethany who knew we were coming and with whom we could stay.

On the next day we went into Jerusalem, and a great crowd followed Jesus from Bethany to the Temple. When he went into the outer court, he saw the money-changers and those selling animals for sacrifice, and he became very angry. He drove out the people selling animals, forcing them to take their animals with them, and he overturned the tables of the

money-changers, saying, "This Temple was made so that all people could come and worship the one God, but it has become a place of buying and selling, a place where the poor have what little they have taken away from them, a place where neither the blind nor the lame nor anyone who is afflicted in any way may come to worship. So those who are most in need of the presence of God are denied entry into this place, which has become a place where only the rich and powerful are welcomed. Truly I say to you, the day is coming when this place will no longer be the sacred place, but that place will be sacred where two or three are gathered in God's name, and where they worship God in spirit and in truth, having first fed the hungry, housed the homeless, visited the prisoner, and comforted the sick, the broken-hearted and those who mourn. When that day comes, God will be present in the midst of them wherever they may be, for the temple of God will be within them. This Temple will pass away, but the temple which the Spirit of God will establish in each person will never pass away."

The people were amazed at his words, although they did not understand them clearly. But the Temple police and some of the elders heard him, and they went and told the chief priests that someone from Galilee (for they knew us by our speech) was blaspheming in the courtyard of the Temple. So some of the chief priests and elders came to where Jesus was teaching the crowds about the reign of God. And they said to him, "How dare you disrupt the business of the Temple, and what right have you to say and do these things?" And Jesus answered them, "I say to you, as the prophet Isaiah said to your forebears:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because God has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor.

God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' "

Then the chief priests and elders became even more angry, because Jesus was saying that he had been sent by God to do these things, and they challenged him about his teachings, but he was able to respond to their challenges, and they went away angry, because they had been shamed and had lost honour. I could see that they were convinced that they must be rid of him, and I wished that he would not challenge the authorities in such a way, although I understood that he felt that it was necessary for him to do what God had sent him to do. If the reign of God was to come to Israel, it was necessary for the oppressions of both the Temple and the Roman government to end, and for this Jesus had come to Jerusalem.

Now the house where Junia and Abigail and I were staying with some of the other disciples was the home of Deborah and Joseph, and it was too small for everyone to eat together. But Jesus wished for us to take all our meals together, and so we gathered for supper that night in the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, which was very large, because they were wealthy people. And while we were eating a strange thing happened, which none of us

understood at the time. Later, when we looked back over all the happenings of those days, we realized what it meant, but that was after Jesus had been killed. One of the women who had been following Jesus, whose name was Miriam, came into the room where we were at table, and she stood behind Jesus and broke open a vial of very costly ointment, and she anointed his head with all the ointment. The fragrance filled the whole house, and it was very beautiful, but some of the women were troubled by it, because it reminded them of the ointments which we use to anoint the dead. And some of the men complained, saying that it was a waste, and that the ointment should have been sold and the money used to help the poor. But Jesus said to them, "Leave her alone, and do not complain about her, because in just this way did the prophets of old anoint those chosen by God. But she is not like those who wish for a warrior king to establish God's reign by driving out the Romans by force. She has truly understood that God's reign is one of peace and justice for all, and that it is present where people serve one another as I have served, in love. Truly I say to you, that wherever the good news of the reign of God will be proclaimed in the whole world, what Miriam has done will be told in remembrance of her."

The next day Jesus went again to the temple to proclaim to the people the good news of the reign of God, and we disciples went with him. While he was teaching, some of the people said to him, " Teacher, we know that you are from God, and we wish to follow you. What therefore must we do?" And Jesus said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them leave home and family, become servants of all, and take up their cross and follow me". And a woman from the crowd asked him, "What do you mean - become

servants of all? Should I therefore humble myself further to those who oppress me? And Jesus answered, "No, my child. Those who should deny themselves are those sitting in the seats of power, living in fine homes, and lording it over the people whom they are oppressing. You who are poor and lowly know what it is to serve, for your lives are made up of service. It is the great among you who must become the servants of all, and it is those who dominate who must give up their dominion and become like slaves. For in the reign of God, there is no domination and no oppression."

Those who were listening to him began to question among themselves, "What does he mean by taking up their cross? Should we seek death by crucifixion at the hands of the Romans?" And Jesus heard their murmurings and said to them, "No one should ever seek death, but all must understand that the work of proclaiming the good news of God's reign is not without danger. You know that those in power do not readily give up that power, and in the past the prophets died for speaking God's truth to the rulers. You have seen that John the Baptist was killed for proclaiming the coming of God's reign, and that the rulers seek to silence me also. The consequences of following me are twofold: the price you will pay for being my follower is persecution, and the blessing you will receive for becoming a servant of all is life everlasting. I am not asking you to become my servant, far from it! For I came into the world not to be served but to serve, and my life is spent redeeming all people from oppression and slavery."

That night we again ate at the home of Mary and Martha: Mary of Magdala and Mary the

mother of James; Joanna, Salome and Miriam; Junia, Abigail and I; Simon Peter and his brother Andrew; James and John the sons of Zebedee; Philip, Thomas, and some others of the men, including Judas Iscariot, who was to hand Jesus over to the Romans. At the time, we did not know that this was the last meal that we would eat with Jesus, but we knew that the rulers were looking for a way to kill him, and so we regarded each moment we had with him as if it might be the last one, and treasured every word he said to us. As was his custom, Jesus thanked God for the bread and fish, broke it, and distributed it to us all. He had been speaking about the Temple, and about how he felt that the right way to worship God was not by buying an animal for the priests to sacrifice, but by sharing God's love with others in this kind of communion. So our table became the altar of God, and the food became our offering to God, better when offered with love than all the sacrifices of the Temple. Then, after supper, he took the cup of wine, and when he had given thanks he gave it to us all, saying that it was more worthy of God than the blood of the sacrificial animals in the Temple. I found his words strange and difficult to understand, and some were clearly upset by them; I saw Judas leave the table with a look on his face that was nearly one of revulsion, and I was suddenly afraid.

After the meal was over, Jesus took some of the men with him and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives. It was a warm and pleasant evening, and some of us women would have gone with them, but the older women thought that it was not right for us to be out walking about after dark, so we stayed behind. I was talking with Joanna, whose husband Chuza was Herod Antipas' steward in Galilee. She had become a disciple

after I did, although she had been supporting Jesus with gifts of food and money almost from the beginning. It must have taken a lot of courage to leave her home and her husband, especially since he held such a prominent position in the government. We all knew that she could never return to her former way of life, and I admired her courage greatly; she was tall and strong, and I thought that she would be a wonderful person to have by your side in a time of trouble. We were talking about how many of the disciples had left so much behind, when suddenly Peter and the others burst in, crying out, "They have arrested him! He has been taken by the soldiers!"

We were all so astonished and terrified, that it took some time before we could piece together what had happened. But gradually we heard the story: Jesus and the others had gone to the Mount of Olives, and from there to a place near the bottom of the hill, called Gethsemane. There Jesus had withdrawn from them for a while to pray. The hour was late, they had eaten a big meal, and they were tired, and so they fell asleep sitting under one of the big olive trees. When Jesus came back, he reproached them, saying, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And at that moment a crowd of soldiers carrying torches and weapons appeared, with some of the Temple police and Judas, who came to Jesus and greeted him with a kiss. That was clearly a pre-arranged signal, and the soldiers seized Jesus, who said to them, "Day after day I was teaching openly, and you did not arrest me for fear of the people's response. So now, when the people are not here, you come in darkness, like thieves in the night, to arrest me

as though I were a bandit." And the soldiers bound him and led him away, but his disciples who were with him fled into the darkness.

When we heard this terrible story, we could hardly believe that Jesus whom we loved had been taken. Amid the general excited talk, Joanna said to me, "Let us go into the city to see if we can find out what is going on." And I agreed eagerly; I felt that I could not remain in the house in Bethany, not knowing what was happening to our beloved Jesus. I said, "We can borrow the cloaks of some of the men: if we are careful no one will guess that we are women." So without saying anything to anyone, we dressed and slipped quietly out of the house. We hurried along the road to Jerusalem, keeping to the shadows at the side of the road whenever other people were passing. We had not expected to meet many travellers so late at night, but it seemed that the closer we got to the city the more people we saw; and in the centre of the city there were large crowds milling about. We did not want to ask anyone where the soldiers had taken Jesus, so we went to the area around Herod's Palace and stood quietly near enough to some men there, so that we could listen to their conversation. They were discussing the arrest of Jesus, and said that he had been taken to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, which was nearby.

We immediately went there, and found a large crowd gathered in the courtyard, but we could not go in, because there was a guard on the gate, and we were afraid of being recognized as women and forced to go away. So we waited outside the gate, and after about three hours, the Temple police came out of Caiaphas' house, and Jesus was in the

midst of them, his hands tied behind his back. Joanna and I almost cried out at the sight of him in captivity, and we clung to each other for strength in the shadows by the wall. Then the Roman soldiers, who had not been allowed inside the high priest's house for fear they would defile everyone, took Jesus from the Temple police and led him away, still bound. A small crowd followed, and Joanna and I mixed with them. They took Jesus to Herod's Palace, where Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea and Samaria, had his headquarters. Now we knew that Pilate was a very cruel and harsh man, who had executed many hundreds of people since he took office a few years ago. So our hearts were filled with fear and foreboding as we watched helplessly while Jesus was led into the Palace. This time, we were able to gain entry into the courtyard along with the crowd, and we stood as close to the doors as we could, while still remaining in the shadows.

Just as the day was dawning, the Roman soldiers brought Jesus out on the dais in front of the doors. They had put a purple cloak around his shoulders; on his head they had placed a crown of thorns, and in his hand a staff. The thorns had pierced the skin of his brow, and little drops of blood were trickling down his face. The soldiers mocked him and spat on him. I could hardly bear to look, and yet I had to watch what was happening. Joanna was weeping silently, the tears streaming down her face. And then Pilate came out and said, "This bandit has been found guilty of claiming to be the King of the Jews; he will be executed in the approved manner, by crucifixion at Golgotha, to serve as an example to anyone else who has dreams of leading revolts and inciting the people to rebellion." Many of the crowd stood indifferently watching the spectacle, but I heard many mutter about the

injustice of Roman rule and about Jesus being a good man, a prophet of God, who was being treated as prophets have always been treated when they speak God's word. But no one dared speak out against Pilate. Then the soldiers led Jesus back into the Palace, and Joanna said to me, "We must go quickly and tell the others. It is becoming light, so let us hurry back to Bethany, and bring the others to Golgotha." So we left, and came back to Bethany.

When we arrived at the house of Martha and Mary, we found all the women there, all very worried about Joanna and me. We realized then that none of the men were in the house; wondering if they had gone to try to rescue Jesus, we asked where they were. Mary of Magdala told us that the men had all left for Galilee just before it was light, because they were afraid of being arrested. We told the women everything we had heard and seen, and immediately we all left to go to Golgotha.

We arrived there just before the third hour, and we saw Jesus carrying the crossbar of his cross to the upright post where he would be crucified. Even now I can hardly bear to recount the events of the next terrible hours. They crucified him between two bandits, and on his cross they placed a sign which read "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews". Sometimes I can still hear the terrible sound of the nails being hammered into his hands and feet. We women stood huddled together, clinging to each other and weeping bitterly. But we did not leave. We stood there watching all that long day, hoping that he could see us and know that we were there with him. All day he hung there, suffering the shame and

the horrible agony without a sound. Then at about the ninth hour, he gave a loud cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" and then he died, and a part of all of us died with him. A little later, some men came to take his body down from the cross, and we watched closely where they took him, because we had to know where he was buried. And after we had seen him placed in a tomb, and a great stone rolled across its mouth, we went back to Bethany. Jesus, our beloved teacher and leader, was gone, and we felt that the life had also gone out of all of us. All the dreams of the freedom of the reign of God seemed to have died on the cross with the one we loved.

The rest of that day and the Sabbath we stayed in the house, talking, praying, weeping, sometimes together, sometimes separately. Then, when the Sabbath was over, Mary of Magdala, and Salome, and Mary the mother of James bought spices so that they might go and anoint his body, as was the custom. And very early on the first day of the week, as soon as the sun had risen, they went to the garden where the tomb was, and Joanna, Miriam, Junia and I went with them. We had been saying to one another, "Will we be able to roll away the stone from the entrance to the tomb?" But when we got there, the stone was already rolled away, and we ran and looked in the tomb, and it was empty. We thought that someone had taken away Jesus' body, and my heart seemed to break in my breast when I realized that we could not perform the last rites for him. While the rest of us remained grieving by the empty tomb, Mary of Magdala went away by herself, weeping, and she saw a man in another part of the garden. Thinking that he was someone who worked there, she said, "Sir, if you know where the body of Jesus has been taken, will you

in mercy tell me?" And the man turned to her and said, "Mary", and she saw that it was Jesus, and she fell to her knees before him. And Jesus said to her,

"Do not be afraid, Mary;

even though I have died, yet I am alive,

and I shall be with you to the close of the age.

I have not appeared to you

until I saw your tears and your sorrow for me.

Cast aside your sadness and carry out this service,

Be my messenger to the distressed orphans.

Hasten to rejoice and go to our brothers.

You will find them gathered on the bank of the Jordan.

Say to them: 'Get up, let us go, your brother is calling you.'

Bring the flock back to the shepherd."

And Mary immediately answered him, saying,

"My teacher, my Lord, I shall carry out your commandment with joy.

I shall give no rest to my heart,

I shall give no sleep to my eyes,

I shall give no rest to my feet,

until I have brought the flock back to the fold."

Now we did not hear anything of this, thinking only that Mary was speaking to one of the

workmen. But when she returned to us, we saw that her face was now radiant with joy, and she cried out to us, "I have seen Jesus! He is not dead, but is risen!" We could scarcely believe her, until she told us what he had said to her, and then we all wept again, but this time for joy. With one more look into the empty tomb, we hurried back to Bethany, and told the other women what had happened. They could scarcely believe us, and yet they knew that what we said must be true - one look at our faces told them that although our weeping had lingered for the night, joy had indeed come with the morning.

Mary wanted to leave for Galilee immediately, but we persuaded her to wait until we could prepare a meal for us all to eat before we set out on the long journey. In a short time we had bread and fish and wine on the table, and we gathered around, looking to Mary to say the blessing over our food. And suddenly, Jesus stood in the midst of us, and he said to us "Peace, do not be afraid", for all of us were trembling before him. And he took the bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to all of us. He shared the meal with us, and when we had eaten, he also took the cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to all of us to drink. Not one of us spoke a word until the meal was over, and then Mary said to him, "Lord, we do not understand what is happening. We saw you die, and now you are alive. How can such a thing be? Will you be with us now, just as before?" And Jesus said to us, "I will be with you, but not as before. I must go now to the Holy One in heaven, the One who is my loving parent and yours. In a little while you will see me no more, but I will be with you through the Holy Spirit of God, who will come to you to be your comforter and advocate. The work of the reign of God falls now to you and the other

disciples, but do not be afraid, for I am with you to the end of the age. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In God's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. Now go and find the others, and tell them I shall see them again in Galilee."

As suddenly as he had appeared, Jesus was gone, and we were left staring at each other in awe and wonderment that such things should be happening to us. Then Mary said, "Now we have all seen that Jesus is indeed risen from the dead. Come, let us go and find our brothers, as he has commanded us." And we left immediately for Galilee.

That night we stopped to rest in a village where we had friends who had also believed Jesus' words, and we told them all that had happened. And they said to us, "What manner of man is this, that he should be raised from the dead?" And Mary answered them, saying, "I believe that Jesus was not just a man, but that he was closer to God than anyone has ever been, even the prophets of old. I think that the flame of God is alight in each of us, but because we are imperfect people we cause the flame to burn very low, and some people, I think, put it out altogether. But in Jesus the flame burned brightly, because he was not imperfect as we are, and so God surely dwelt in him and God made him to become like God's own son. I believe that at his baptism, because his heart was so open to the Holy One, Divine Wisdom filled him completely, so that he was at the same time

completely a human being and a divine spirit."

Then the people asked, "But if he was the incarnation of Divine Wisdom and like a son to God, why did he have to die? How could God let a beloved child die in so terrible a way?" And Mary said, "I do not know the answers to these questions; all I can do is tell you what I think. I believe that Wisdom chose Jesus to bring us the good news of the reign of God, which is the good news that she loves us and stands with us in our poverty and oppression. She knew, and Jesus came to know, that proclaiming this news, which is good to us but not to those in power, would bring the one proclaiming it into conflict with the rulers, conflict that could be fatal. And we know that God created us all with free will, so that we have to choose how we will live and die; God will not choose for us. Divine Wisdom is all-powerful; she could have intervened and saved Jesus, but that would have meant denying Jesus the free will with which he was born, and it would also have told us that there are limits on God's love for us.

"Therefore, I believe that God allowed Jesus to choose whether to continue to do what he believed was right, and God's will, even if it meant death, or to turn away from what he believed was right in order to avoid death. And Jesus chose to die rather than to deny what he believed to be right. I believe that he died a martyr, but more than a martyr; martyrs are human beings, imperfect and sinful. Jesus was so filled with Divine Wisdom, the Spirit of God, that he was more than an ordinary human being, and therefore more than all the martyrs of history. He died to show us that there are no limits to God's love for us, that

God will never abandon us, no matter what the cost to herself. I remember that Jesus once said to me that anyone who tries to save her life will lose it, but anyone who is willing to lose her life for the sake of the reign of God will save it. I did not understand what he meant at the time, but now I think that I do. God raised Jesus from the dead to show us that just as he lost his life for the sake of God's reign and yet gained a new life, so we, if we live our lives for God's purposes in God's reign, will also gain new lives. Jesus has defeated death for our sake, and we must now live and die for the sake of bringing about God's reign of love, justice and peace here in the world."

Anna's re-telling of the good news of Jesus Christ and the reign of God ends with these words of Mary of Magdala, the apostle to the apostles. But the story of Jesus, like the reign of God, which is here and not here, now and not yet, lives on in the lives of all of us who try to be faithful to the meaning of our own re-telling of the story.

Chapter 4

Anna's Wisdom/Sophia Christology

Just as in Chapter 2 I argued that the idea that there were women in the inner circle of Jesus' disciples, and later in leadership roles in the early church, was based on historical evidence, and was not a figment of twentieth century feminist imagination, so in this chapter I shall argue that the Sophia christology of Anna's Gospel was a viable, in fact important, first century christology. In order to do this, I shall present first the evidence for Sophia as she appears in the Hebrew Bible and intertestamental literature; and second the evidence for a Sophia christology in the Christian Testament. This will be followed by a section on Sophia christology for today, including a reflection on the development of my own Sophia christology. A word about terminology is in order here. The word "wisdom" in Greek is σοφία (sophia), a feminine noun. When referring to the personified Wisdom of the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Testament and the intertestamental literature, I shall use "Sophia." The decision to use "Sophia" rather than "Wisdom" is intentional: it reveals and emphasizes her gender, and keeps it always in the foreground of our minds.

Alison Cheek, in her letter from Junia to Anna, refers both to God and to Jesus as "Wisdom"; Anna, in her reply, claims that, like Mary of Magdala, she also believes that Jesus is the incarnation of Wisdom. In the Gospel according to Anna, Mary Magdalene's

explanation of her understanding of the meaning of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth is expressed in terms of a Wisdom christology. In my reconstruction, Mary, and later Anna, first understand Jesus as a messenger or prophet of Sophia, and then come to believe in him as the embodiment of Sophia, the incarnation of Sophia herself. I chose Sophia christology for Anna for two main reasons. First, since Anna was a disciple of Jesus and a member of the earliest post-Easter communities of the primitive church, it seemed logical to have her follow what appears to have been one of the earliest, if not the earliest, christologies of the emerging Christian faith. Second, Sophia christology is one with which I am comfortable myself, and which I have gradually embraced as my own during the past few years. From a feminist point of view, I can think of no other christology that helps me to see the Divine in Jesus in a way that is not androcentrically biased and patriarchally oriented.

The women in my reconstruction represent imaginary portrayals of real and imaginary people. However, so that the christology of Anna's Gospel may not be thought of as a work of the imagination, it is appropriate to show that their views of the person and work of Jesus corresponds to the beliefs of at least some, maybe the majority, of his actual early followers. For this reason, this chapter will discuss the identity of Sophia and the development of Sophia christology in the earliest church, since, as James Dunn has said, the early identification of Jesus with Sophia is a "motif that was to become the principal

focus in the burgeoning Christology of the next two centuries."[86] In the same way, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, especially in her *In Memory of Her* and *Jesus, Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet,* [87] concludes that one of the earliest understandings of Jesus in the early church was in terms of a Sophia christology. Since this is the case, it is fitting that the beliefs of Anna (as well as of Junia and Mary) should include a Sophia christology.

In the immediate post-Easter period, when the first followers of Jesus reflected on his life and death, they were faced with the problem of attempting to make sense of everything that had happened - his life and teachings and, more difficult, and for them, perhaps more important, his shameful death on the cross. Since they believed that Jesus had a special relationship with God and that he was in some way still with them, they naturally looked both to the oral traditions of the ordinary people (the "little tradition") and to their Scriptures (the "great tradition") for help in what Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza calls the attempt to "make meaning"[88] of his life and death. It is, of course, impossible to reproduce accurately the content of the oral tradition of the first century, but it is possible to make an educated guess about it. Since Sophia in the Jewish scriptures was female, it

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[86]James D.G.Dunn, "Pauline Christology: Shaping the Fundamental Structures" in *Christology in Dialogue*, eds. Robert F. Berkey and Sarah A. Edwards (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1993), 101.

[87]Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, Chapter 4, especially 130-140, and Chapter 5, especially 184-199; *Jesus. Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet.* (New York: Continuum, 1994), Chapter 5.

[88]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus, Miriam's Child*, 108.

seems most reasonable that Jewish women would have been very interested in keeping her stories alive, and that the "little tradition" of the people would therefore have contained stories of Wisdom. In terms of the "great tradition" of the learned, it seems clear that the searching of the Scriptures by literate people within the reign-of-God movement and the early church led them to make connections between Jesus and Sophia. At this point it is necessary to take a step back and establish the identity of Sophia as she is portrayed in the Hebrew bible and the apocryphal or intertestamental literature.

Sophia in the Hebrew Bible and Intertestamental Literature

Although Sophia is relatively unknown in the Christian Church today, it is important to note that there is more written about her in the Hebrew Scriptures than any other figure with the exception of God, Job, Moses and David.[89] It is reasonable to assume that she has been suppressed because she did not fit the Church's idea of an exemplary female figure, and because what is written in the Scriptures about her power and her relationship to the divine might have undermined the Church's teaching of the (male) Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, Sophia had an important place in the Jewish understanding of the nature and activities of God, as we can see from even a brief examination of what was written about her in the "Wisdom literature" of the Bible.

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[89]Susan Cady, Marian Ronan and Hal Taussig. *Wisdom's Feast: Sophia in Study and Celebration* (San Francisco: Harper, 1989), 15.

Although there are references to Sophia in many places in the Hebrew Scriptures and intertestamental literature, we owe our knowledge of her mainly to material found in Job 28, Proverbs 1-9, Sirach 24, Baruch 3:9-4:4, the Wisdom of Solomon and 1 Enoch 42. If these passages are set in the most likely chronological order, it becomes clear that there is a change in the way the various authors/redactors speak of Sophia. A few examples will suffice to illustrate this development. The earliest of these texts, Job 28, written around the seventh or sixth[90] centuries BCE, tells of a wisdom that has not been personified, an "utterly elusive and hidden" wisdom that "cannot be found by human effort alone,"[91] but must be revealed (Job 28:23-28). Such a wisdom belongs only to God, is understood only by God, and is bestowed only by God. In this text, which John Ashton calls "a profound poem on the essential mysteriousness and inaccessibility of wisdom,"[92] wisdom is regarded as the creativity used by God to order the universe, which is inaccessible to mortals (28:13), and which cannot be purchased for any price (28: 15-19). However, in view of later changes, this portrayal of wisdom as an unpersonified attribute of God appears to have been " not ultimately the most satisfying one in biblical or

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[90]On the problems of dating Job, see Norman Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 40-42.

[91]Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Wisdom Was Made Flesh and Pitched Her Tent Among Us" in *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol: Essays in Feminist Christology*, ed. Maryanne Stevens. (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 99.

[92]John Ashton, "The Transformation of Wisdom: A Study of the Prologue of John's Gospel." *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986), 163.

intertestamental Judaism."[93]

The final redaction of the book of Proverbs probably took place in the post-exilic period (sixth century BCE and later), making it slightly later than Job. The first nine chapters, which contain much of the Wisdom material, are probably among the most recently written parts of the book, possibly fifth century BCE. In Proverbs, Wisdom takes on the personification that probably seemed natural, given the feminine gender of the word both in Hebrew (hokmâ) and in Greek (σοφία). The first nine chapters of the book take the form of discourses of advice on life and behaviour from a father to his son. Interspersed in these androcentric discourses, particularly in Chapters 7-9, are "Wisdom poems" celebrating the existence and attributes of Sophia. In Proverbs 8, she is portrayed as a female figure, possessed by God even before the world was made. She says:

> "God possessed me, the first principle of his sovereignty,
> before any of his acts;
> Before then, from of old I was poured out,
> from the first, before the beginnings of the world." (Prov 8:22-23)

The scene shifts slightly: having brought Sophia into being, God is creating the world, and Sophia is by God's side, helping in the work of creation and bringing joy to God:

> "When God established the heavens, I was there,
> when God inscribed a circle on the face of the deep;
> when God set the zenith firmly on high,
> and made the mighty fountains of the abyss;
> when God made the statute for the sea,
> that the waters might not pass the bounds he commanded;

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[93]Gail Corrington, *Her Image of Salvation: Female Saviours and Formative Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 104.

when God marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him binding all together;
I was God's daily joy, constantly making merry in his presence,
Rejoicing in the habitable world
and delighting in the human race." (Prov 8:27-31)[94]

Later, Sophia is pictured as a teacher and mediator of God's relationship with Israel: "For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favour from the Lord." (Prov 8:32-35).

In Wisdom of Solomon 7-8, written much later, probably during the latter half of the first century BCE, "the divine status of Wisdom and her role in creation comes to clearest expression."[95] First, Sophia's attributes are listed (Wisd 7:22-23), and then her relationship with God is shown to be more than that of Creator and created:

"For she is a breath of the power of God,
and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty;
therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her.
For she is a reflection of eternal light,
a spotless mirror of the working of God,
and an image of God's goodness.
Although she is but one, she can do all things,
and while remaining in herself, she renews all things;
in every generation she passes into holy souls,
and makes them friends of God, and prophets." (Wisd 7:25-27)

Later, in Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11, she is said to be beloved of God (8:3), to sit at God's throne (9:4) and to have carried out all the saving acts of God during Israel's salvation

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[94]In both of these passages from Proverbs 8, I have chosen to use the translation of R.B.Y.Scott, found in *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (Anchor Bible. Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), 68, replacing most of the several repetitions of "he" with "God." to allow a more inclusive reading.

[95]James D.G.Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 2nd ed.(London: SCM Press, 1989),169.

history (Ch. 10 and 11). From all this it becomes clear that Sophia is God, imaged not in metaphors of maleness but in metaphors of femaleness.

These personifications portray Sophia first as a wise woman, the primordial creation of God; then as participant in creation, teacher and bringer of life to all who hear her words, mediator between God and humanity; and finally as the embodiment of God's presence in the lives of God's chosen people. In every generation Sophia becomes embodied in the righteous, who, acting as her prophets, are then closely related to God. Dwelling in Jerusalem, the holy city of God (Ben Sira 24:11), she is the immanent side of the transcendent God. In *She Who Is*, Elizabeth Johnson summarizes her understanding of Sophia as "a female personification of God's own being in creative and saving involvement with the world"; she arrives at this interpretation because of "the functional equivalence between the deeds of Sophia and those of the biblical God."[96] What is usually said of God is said of Sophia: that she creates (Prov 8:22-31), redeems (throughout history humans "were saved by Sophia" - Wisd 9:18) and sustains those who are her people (in Wisd 10:17 "she became a shelter to them by day, and a starry flame through the night"). "[T]he Wisdom of God in Jewish thought is simply God, revealing and known."[97]

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[96]Elizabeth A. Johnson. *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 91.

[97]Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God: A Biblical Basis for Non-Androcentric Christology." *Ephemerides Theologicae Louvanienses* 61 (1985), 274.

Sophia in the Early Church

(a) Paul's Letters

In arguing that Sophia christology was a christology of the early church, I shall begin with Paul's letters, since they are generally acknowledged to be the earliest Christian writings to which we have direct access. The passages that show the clearest and most explicit link between Jesus and Sophia are 1 Corinthians 1:24 and 30:

> ". . . to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power (δύναμις) and the Wisdom (Σοφία) of God."
>
> " [God] is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us Wisdom (Σοφία) from God. . . ."

What does Paul mean by these sentences? I agree with James Dunn: Paul believed that the same Divine Sophia who was active in creation was active in Jesus; that is, God in the person of Sophia was acting in and through Jesus. In addition, Sophia is "wholly identified with Jesus", and "totally embodied in Jesus"; "Wisdom . . . is now most fully expressed in Jesus." The divine care and concern for humanity, personified as Sophia in the "Wisdom literature" of the Hebrew Bible and the intertestamental literature, is revealed as manifested in Jesus the Crucified and Risen One. [98] These passages clearly identify Jesus with Sophia and provide us with evidence for Sophia christology in Pauline thought.

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[98]James D.G.Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 195.

(b) The Sayings Gospel Q and the Gospel of Luke

The Gospels of both Luke and Matthew contain passages that are reminiscent of passages about Sophia from the Hebrew Bible and the intertestamental literature. These passages are not found in Mark, and are therefore considered to be from the Sayings Gospel Q. Although the date of the move from the oral sayings tradition to the written Q Sayings Gospel is not known, it is thought to have been relatively early, probably between 50 and 60 CE.[99] This means that the Q community was one of the earliest of the post-Easter communities of which we have any written evidence, and it locates the written Q Sayings Gospel within the earliest writings of the primitive church, at about the same time as, or very shortly after, the letters of Paul.

The Q Sayings Gospel presents Jesus as a wise man (σοφός) who speaks in aphorisms, or wise sayings. In Q, Jesus, along with John the Baptizer, is portrayed as a child of Sophia, demonstrating her gracious goodness by caring for the outcast, and justifying her in the face of criticism and enmity. Jesus is also said to be Sophia's prophet, rejected as were her prophets from the beginning of Israel's history. The Q Sayings Gospel is a reconstruction from the sayings of Jesus in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels. Most scholars agree that the Lukan sayings are closer to the original Q, and so I shall use examples from Luke's Gospel to illustrate the christology of Q.

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[99]Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press [Sacra Pagina Series], 1991), 6.

In Lk 7:35, the Lukan Jesus, speaking of the criticisms that have been levelled against both himself and John the Baptist, says, "Nevertheless, Sophia is vindicated by all her children." This saying from Q implies that Jesus was identified as a child or prophet of Sophia in the Q community. Then, in Luke 11:49, Jesus, who has been denouncing the Pharisees and the lawyers, says, "Therefore also the Sophia of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute.'" Since Jesus had clearly been persecuted and killed, this saying from Q implies that Sophia was the one who had sent him, the latest in a long line of prophets, to Israel.

From these examples, we can see that the Q Sayings Gospel spoke of Jesus as a prophet, perhaps the last or greatest prophet of Sophia (cf. Lk 11:31-32 - "something greater than Solomon is here!"). There is, however no conclusive proof that the Q community identified Jesus with Sophia herself. Dunn concludes that this implies that Jesus did not understand himself "as Wisdom, or as the incarnation of (pre-existent) Wisdom," although it is probable that he may have thought of himself as a prophet of Sophia.[100] In Q and Luke, Jesus is identified not as Sophia but as the messenger of Sophia.

(c) The Gospel of Matthew

In his use of the Q sayings, Matthew appears to have taken the step of identifying

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[100]Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 210.

Jesus as the incarnation of Sophia herself.[101] While the Lukan Jesus refers to himself (and to John) as a child of Sophia (7:35, above), Matthew alters the Q passage: the Matthean Jesus, in the same situation of responding to criticisms of himself and John, says "...yet Sophia is vindicated by all her deeds."(Mt 11:19) The implication is that Jesus was the incarnation of Sophia, not just her child or prophet, since Sophia was performing her deeds through him. Then in the Matthean parallel to Lk 11:49 (above), Jesus does not quote Sophia but speaks as Sophia herself: "Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify . . ." Finally, there is the parallel between the Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira (Sirach) and Matthew 11:28-30, in which words reminiscent of the words of Sophia are put into the mouth of Jesus. In Sirach 51, Sophia says:

> *Draw near to me*, you who are uneducated,
> and lodge in the house of instruction. (Sir 51:23)

Later, the speaker says of Sophia:

> *Put your neck under the yoke, and let your souls receive instruction;*
> it is to be found close by.
> See with your own eyes that I have laboured but little
> and have *found for myself much rest*. (Sir 51:26-27)

In Matthew 11, the Matthean Jesus says:

> "*Come to me*, all you that are weary
> and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.
> *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me*;
> for I am gentle and humble of heart,
> and you will *find rest for your souls.*
> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Mt 11:28-30)

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[101]M. Jack Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law in Matthew's Gospel* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 95-96.

In the first of the passages from Sirach, *Sophia invites* people to "draw near to me," and in the second, the teacher invites them to put their necks under *Sophia's* yoke. In the Matthean passage, *Jesus invites* people, "Come to me," and it is Jesus who invites them to take *his* yoke upon them, saying that *his* yoke is easy. This transference from Sophia to Jesus is evidence of the Matthean community's identification of Jesus with Sophia.

The evidence from Matthew and Luke may be summed up in the following way: the early Q community, from which the Wisdom sayings in Luke and Matthew are drawn, appears to have regarded Jesus as a prophet of Sophia. While the Lukan community seems generally to have continued to understand Jesus as a child or prophet of Sophia, Matthew's community took this one step further, regarding Jesus as Sophia herself. The passages from Matthew are evidence for a Wisdom/Sophia christology in his community. As Jack Suggs concluded, "Although speculation about Sophia came to Matthew from at least one source, Q, . . . Matthew used the Wisdom themes in his own way. Whereas there were those by whom Jesus was viewed simply as the last in the long line of Wisdom's representatives, Matthew daringly identified Jesus with Wisdom. For the evangelist, Jesus was not Wisdom's child but Wisdom incarnate."[102] In view of Paul's use of Sophia christology a decade or two before Matthew, we may not agree with Suggs' use of the term "daring," but there is no question that he was correct in identifying Matthew's Sophia christology.

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[102]Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law*, 130.

(d) The Gospel of John

Finally, evidence of Sophia christology is found also in the Gospel of John, which was written after the other canonical Gospels, probably around 90 C.E. The Sophia christology of the Fourth Gospel is not overt, but is hidden in allusions; "John's clearest reference to the riches of Wisdom theology is in the Prologue, but there Jesus is identified with the Logos, not with Wisdom."[103] Many scholars, for example Raymond Brown, James Dunn and Reginald Fuller, refer to Sophia when commenting on the prologue, although her name does not appear there. However, the Logos of the prologue bears many resemblances to Sophia, among them that both "came forth from the mouth of the Most High" (Sir 24:3), both existed "before the beginnings of the world" (Prov 8:23), and both were called "maker of all things" (Wisd 7:22 and 8:6). Read in this way, it becomes clear that in the prologue Jesus is identified with Sophia. Elizabeth Johnson expresses it well: "The figure of divine Sophia shines through the Logos terminology; at the point of fullest development they are theologically identical."[104] However, the female Sophia has been displaced by the male Logos, and the loving Divine Sophia caring for and delighting in her human children has been obscured by the christology of the Father and Son, which emphasizes Jesus' biological maleness and presumes God's maleness as well.

What has been said about the prologue can also be said about the Fourth Gospel as

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[103]Piet Schoonenberg, "A sapiential reading of John's Prologue: some reflections on views of Reginald Fuller and James Dunn." *Theology Digest* 33 (1986), 410.

[104]Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 288.

a whole, since, as Dunn has said, the prologue is "the window through which to read the Fourth Gospel."[105] For example, Sophia existed with God before the earth was made (Prov 8:22-23, Wisd 6:22), and Jesus/Logos was with the Father "before the world existed" (Jn 17:5); Sophia is "the pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty" (Wisd 7:25), and Jesus/Logos speaks of "the glory that I had in your [the Father's] presence" (Jn 17:5); Sophia is the reflection of eternal light (Wisd 7:26), and Jesus/Logos is "the light of the world" (Jn 8:12). The Sophia christology of the Fourth Gospel is almost completely obscured, just as the Sophia christology of the Prologue is, by the Logos image and the extensive use of the Father-Son axis to refer to Jesus' relationship to the Divine. However, many scholars, for example Helmut Koester, acknowledge that "the author of the Fourth Gospel tells the story of the life of Wisdom herself, of the Logos himself, in the form of a biography of Jesus, the Wisdom/Logos incarnate."[106] And Raymond Brown states that "Jesus is divine Wisdom, pre-existent, but now come among men [sic] to teach them and give them life."[107]

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[105]Schoonenberg, "A Sapiential Reading", 411, referring to James D.G.Dunn, "Let John Be John: A Gospel for Its Time" in *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien* (Vorträge vom Tübinger Symposium 1982), ed. Pater Stuhlmacher (Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983).

[106]Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 270.

[107]Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company [Anchor Bible], 1966), 524.

Even the scholars who write about the Sophia christology of the Fourth Gospel continue to cover her traces with androcentrically biased terminology. For example, John Ashton considers that the Fourth Evangelist's interest in the prologue was double: "it is a meditation on wisdom offering a variation on a traditional theme; it is also a hymn to the Incarnate Word." He then goes on to say that in the Prologue "the history of Wisdom has been re-enacted by Christ."[108] In spite of writing that the Prologue shows evidence of Sophia christology, even Ashton spells Wisdom with a small "w" in the first sentence, while in the same sentence he spells Incarnate Word with capitals. A similar "androcentricizing" occurs in Dunn's *Christology in the Making*, where, with what Elizabeth Johnson calls "an intriguing use of pronouns,"[109] Dunn says:

> "So the deity of Christ is the deity of Wisdom incarnate; that is, to recognize the deity of Christ is to recognize that in Christ God manifested *himself*, *his* power as creator, *his* love as saviour, in a full and final way."[110] (emphasis added)

Interpreters continue to submerge Wisdom, even when they write articles and books that establish that she was the Holy One who was embodied in Jesus, and "that the history of Wisdom has been re-enacted by Christ."[111]

In summary, Sophia christology was one of the most important facets of the first

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[108]Ashton, "The Transformation of Wisdom," 179.

[109]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 280.

[110]Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 212.

[111]Ashton, "The Transformation of Wisdom," 179.

century Christians' attempts to understand who Jesus was and what his life and death meant to them. Paul, the Q community, and the communities of Luke, Matthew and John, in their various ways of expressing the relationship between Jesus and Sophia, were not only explaining the relevance of Jesus to their lives. They were also justifying their belief that Jesus' life, death and continued presence with them had cosmic relevance, because in some mysterious way Sophia, the expression of God's love for all creation had entered into Jesus, making him her prophet, or embodying her divine self in him. It has been our loss, those of us who are inheritors of the traditions of Jesus, that Sophia's central place in the developing christologies of the early church was so quickly and almost completely displaced by the androcentric christologies of Son of God and Word (Logos) of God.

Toward a Sophia Christology for Today

In order to articulate my view of a Sophia christology for today, I find that I must begin with an account of my own struggle toward an understanding of the life and death of Jesus, starting with how I understand the event that I believe marked the turning point in his life: his baptism by John. I believe that at his baptism Jesus became in some mysterious way completely and perfectly open to Sophia/God. We too can be, and often are, open to Sophia/God, but most of us are unwilling or unable to open our hearts completely to the Divine, while Jesus was totally open to her. She poured herself into him, just as she desires

to pour herself into us, and he became filled with the Divine. For me, this is the meaning of "fully human and fully divine" - a human being so filled with Sophia/God that the Divine and the human are inseparable. I believe that Jesus, as a result, had a very intimate relationship with Sophia/God, and that because of this his life and death may be interpreted as a revelation of the transcendent God who would otherwise be unknowable. Sophia/ God's intention for humanity, that is, the reign of God, is revealed to us through Jesus' life, ministry, teachings and death, which, if they truly represent her reign, must be inter-related, and must therefore all proclaim the same message of salvation, which I define as the bringing of people into right relation with each other, with all creation, and with her.

If Jesus is the revelation of the transcendent God, the embodiment of Sophia, and if her vision for creation is revealed through Jesus, an examination of his life will reveal to us something of Sophia herself. When we read about Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, we see that they present us with a Jesus who freely teaches, heals and feeds people. In their first century setting, the majority of people who came to Jesus lived at the bare subsistence level; they were exploited by their rulers, the inextricably interwoven religious and political hierarchies; they were poor, debt-ridden through no fault of their own, and often hopeless; and they were longing for liberation and salvation. Jesus met them where they were, teaching them to love one another as Sophia/God loves them, healing their brokenness and marginalization, and feeding them in body and spirit. The reign of Sophia/God which he proclaimed was a place of wholeness and abundance, and his teachings, healings, and feedings demonstrate that fact.

When Jesus healed people, he did more than make them physically well. He cast out the demons of fear, offered forgiveness for sins, and broke the boundaries of ritual impurity. He did this by word and by touch, by being present in love and compassion with those who were suffering, and by ignoring the boundaries established by the religious purists of the day. Just as in Jesus we see Sophia/God embodied, in these healings we are able to see the embodied expression of her love for all people.

The healings described in the Synoptic Gospels are linguistically linked with salvation; of the many times the verb σώζω is used (about 45 times), nearly one-third of the uses (13) are in connection with a healing story. The NRSV translates σώζω in these situations as "made whole" or "healed", but σώζω is translated in all the other instances as "saved". So the Markan Jesus says (5:34) to the hemorrhaging woman "ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε" - "your faith has healed/saved you". Thus healing may also be interpreted as salvation - the restoration of people to right relationship with Sophia/God. The healings are symbolic of her desire to heal not merely the physical but more importantly the spiritual brokenness and sickness of the world, and to bring the world's people into the reign of Sophia/God - the circle of her unconditional and unchanging love.

Jesus was so filled with Sophia/God that he was totally committed to this healing of wounded and alienated humanity and the restoration of this right relationship; he continued to proclaim the βασιλεία τοΟ θεοΟ - the reign of Sophia/God's love and reconciliation -

even though he knew that he was antagonizing the religious/ political establishment and that he would almost certainly be arrested for his activities. By healing, which was the prerogative of the religious establishment, and by announcing the inbreaking of Sophia/God's "imperial rule,"[112] which was in contradistinction to Caesar's imperial rule, Jesus must certainly have been fully aware of the fact that he would be considered a threat to the religious/political structures of Roman-occupied Palestine. He chose to go to Jerusalem even though he knew that he was in danger of being executed. Obviously, his motive for going to the place of greatest danger cannot be known for sure, but I believe that he went to Jerusalem because he saw it, as did many of Sophia's prophets before him, as the seat of the oppressive power ruling his people, and also because it was the place where many of the people to whom he felt called to proclaim Sophia/God's message of love and justice would be gathered.

To draw a personal parallel, a few years ago I made a decision to go to Africa to work among the refugees of a civil war. I was not unique; thousands have made similar decisions in the past, and thousands more will do so in the future. What motivated me, and what has motivated and will continue to motivate others, was a sense of being called by God to serve in this way. I was not seeking martyrdom, nor did I have a death wish; I was simply answering what I perceived to be a call. When on a couple of occasions I thought

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[112]The term "imperial rule" is taken from *The Complete Gospels: the Annotated Scholars' Version*, Robert J. Miller, editor (San Francisco: Harper, 1994). It represents the authors' translation of ὁ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, referring to "God's ruling power rather than any particular geographical or spiritual place." (page 14)

that I might in fact be killed, as an Irish priest and a Dutch doctor, his wife, and their four-year old daughter were after I left, I still had the feeling of doing God's will, but not that God willed me (or them) to die. God had invited us to serve, but we had a choice; we (at least we adults) went of our own free will. God created the people who were doing the killing, but they had a choice; they killed of their own free will to destroy what they feared and/or hated. Jesus went to Jerusalem of his own free will, called by Sophia/God to serve her people; those who killed him were acting out of their own collective will to destroy what they feared and hated. Jesus warned his followers that there are risks associated with working for the justice of the reign of Sophia/God. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus tells all who would follow him that they will receive persecutions in the midst of blessings (Mk 10:30), just as he will. The path to eternal life is seeking and doing Sophia/God's will by following Jesus, a path which leads through places and times of blessings and through places and times of suffering, for Jesus as well as for his disciples.

I do not believe that Sophia/God willed that Jesus should die as some form of sacrifice, nor do I believe that Jesus, by going to Jerusalem, invited death in some sort of desire for martyrdom. I believe that he was crucified by the Roman powers at the urging of the ruling political/religious hierarchy, and died at the hands of men because he refused to compromise his beliefs and principles by giving up the work to which he believed Sophia/God had called him. His death was a direct consequence of the way he chose to live his life, embodying Sophia - the Divine love for humanity. To say that Sophia/God allowed Jesus to die is, in fact, true, in the sense that she permitted Jesus to exercise his

free will by allowing him to choose to go to the cross rather than abandon his beliefs.

How is all of this salvific? First, I do not believe that salvation is linked solely to Jesus' death, but comes to us both through his life as the embodiment of Sophia, with its teaching and praxis of the reign of God, and through his death, which came as a direct consequence of that teaching and praxis. For me, Jesus' life and death are two sides of the same coin: both his life of service and his death in service are expressions of Sophia's love for all people. Second, I believe that what is salvific about the Jesus story is the connections we make between it and our own stories. Anyone who chooses suffering or death rather than abandon a praxis of justice, love and peace is demonstrating a commitment to principle that has within it great power for most people. When the person who so chooses is Jesus, who was the very embodiment of Sophia/God, that Divinity in which we all share, the message of self-giving love is for me overwhelmingly powerful. The suffering/death of Jesus is salvific for me because I believe that Sophia/God has unimaginable power, and that she could have "rescued" Jesus from death on the cross, just as she could have rescued Felim, Ellco, Karin and little Zita from death in Sierra Leone. However, she chose not to rescue him, or them, because that would have shown the rest of us that there are limits on her love for humanity. ("I want you all within my reign, but only if the price is not too high; only if those who have chosen to be my envoys, *and I who am embodied in them*, don't have to suffer.") In refusing to exercise this power, but instead accepting the suffering and grief, Sophia/God tells me that the least perfect of her children,

like me, are as important to her as those who are most perfect, like Jesus. The power in Jesus' life and death, and the power in the life and death of any person who chooses to risk everything in order to further God's reign of justice, love and peace, is christic power,[113] the power of Sophia/God's love for us and of her presence in us, and that person plays a part in the never-ending story of salvation which Jesus exemplifies for Christians.

These thoughts and ideas have only become part of my personal belief system during the past few years, and I know that they will change and grow during the years to come. Indeed, I suspect that the development of a Sophia christology for the present time will be for me very much a "work in progress" for the rest of my life. The development of a Sophia christology requires that we "peel away" the androcentrism of the Father-Son language and of the male Logos image, and let the sun shine in on the beauty of the Sophia image. Denis Edwards says that "when the female figure of Sophia is identified with the limited, male, Galilean Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, something powerful happens in Christology. It creates a paradigm shift . . . in [which] there may be an initial unease with the identification of the male Jesus with the female Sophia. The level of this unease reveals the degree to which the pre-existing Word, the 'Son of God' has been assumed to

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[113]Carter Heyward, in *Staying Power: Reflections on Gender, Justice, and Compassion* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1995), page 155, note 3, defines as "christic power" the power of God that moved Jesus "as a brother - one among many - rather than as the one and only Son of God. His christic power is ours as well."

be literally male."[114]

For too many centuries the male Jesus of Nazareth has been conflated with the Logos, the "Son of God", the second person of the Trinity, thereby envisioning the Divine embodied in him as necessarily male. The gender of Jesus has been used to image God as male, with the result that maleness is considered normative and exclusively able to represent God. One way to address the issue of the subordination and exclusion of women caused by this kind of christology has been to reconstruct the inclusive and egalitarian praxis of Jesus and the reign-of-God movement, as I have tried to do in Chapter 2. Development of a Sophia christology is a second and further way to address this problem. As the work of Elizabeth Johnson shows clearly, the identification of Jesus with Sophia by the earliest church can form a foundation for a non-androcentric Sophia christology for today. Adoption of a Sophia christology can be instrumental in reversing the erroneous theology, which is particularly detrimental to women, represented by (and caused by) the extension of the gender of Jesus to the gender of God.

It is important to note that the earlier communities such as the Pauline churches and the Matthean community did not appear to have any difficulty with the idea of the female Divine Sophia's being embodied in the male Jesus of Nazareth, while the later Johannine community apparently felt the need to substitute the male Logos for the female Sophia. As

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[114]Denis Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 61.

Johnson asks, "Could this shift to the Logos concept be associated with the broader shift in the Christian community toward more patriarchal ecclesial structures and the blocking of women from ministries in which they had earlier participated?"[115] In any case, the development and adoption of a Sophia christology addresses the problem of the androcentricity of the Logos christology by no longer imaging the God who was embodied in Jesus in terms that are exclusively male, but also in terms that are female, and acts as a corrective to the erroneous attribution of Jesus' maleness to the God who is neither male nor female but is imaged by both male and female.

In addition to the important correction that a Sophia christology brings to the androcentrically biased "classical" Christologies, I have found that the concept of Sophia provides a sense of the Sacred that is easy for me, as a woman, to relate to; Sophia is immanent, personal, and relational. Claudia Camp expresses well my feelings about Sophia in her essay in *The Listening Heart*: "She [Wisdom] insists on authority that is personal, relational and, as female, liminal. The written word only incompletely represents what it means to walk in Wisdom's way. Full knowledge comes only through love of Wisdom who is met in the highways and byways of life, known in the order of nature, and enjoyed in the house of feasting. The transcendent otherness to which the metaphor

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[115]Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 288.

Woman Wisdom refers is life in all its relationality, with people, nature and God."[116]

I believe that Jesus represents the embodiment of Sophia/God's love for us; this love is truly embodied in Jesus Sophia, and is not just a part of some abstract theological or christological debate to be written about in books. Jesus Sophia calls us in our embodied selves to follow her in her life-giving praxis of love and justice. A Sophia christology requires that we love ourselves, other people and all creation as we love Jesus Sophia, and as Jesus Sophia loves us, unconditionally and personally, and that we express that love through a praxis of peace- and justice-making. We must look into the faces of our sisters and brothers, particularly those faces that are different from our own, whom we meet "in the highways and byways of life", and into the face of the earth and the faces of all its creatures, and see there the face of Jesus Sophia. Because she is not a transcendent "other", but an immanent presence of the Sacred, Sophia, like the reign of God, is within us and among us and around us; we have only to open our eyes and our hearts to her.

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[116]Claudia V. Camp, "Woman Wisdom as Root Metaphor: A Theological Consideration" in *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in honor of Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm.* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press [JSOT Supplement Series 58], 1987, 65.

Chapter 5

Using "The Gospel According to Anna" in Women's Groups

It is my intention to use Anna's Gospel and the feminist reconstruction of early Christian life and christology in two quite different settings when I return to my home in Nova Scotia: one in the form of Bible study with an already existing women's Bible study group, and the other with a group or groups of non-church-attending women who are clients of some of the Women's Centres in the Province. As a Deacon in First Baptist Church, Halifax, I have been involved in Bible Study Programs in the past, and I have discussed with the Senior Minister, Rev. John Boyd, a program to use this work with a group of women in the fall. This group, which meets once a week at the home of one of the members, consists of eight older women who gather specifically for Bible study. They have been meeting for about three years, and they seem open to the idea of my leading their group for a time in order to introduce them to some new approaches to biblical interpretation. The word "feminist" has not been used in our conversations, but it is my impression that they will be interested in learning new ways of interpreting the gospel.

The second proposed use of this material is quite different. It was once suggested to me by a woman therapist that Anna's Gospel would be a useful tool in working with women who have no connection with church, who feel that the Bible has been used as a

weapon against them, and who have, in fact, been badly hurt by this misuse of the Bible. She felt that these women might discover that the story of Jesus and the reign-of-God movement, as told by a woman, could have something of value to say to them, and that it would be healing for them to learn that the way the Bible had been used against them was not in keeping with the original message or intent of Jesus and, therefore, of God. I would like to see if there are in fact women who might be helped in this way, and I propose to offer, through a friend who is involved in some Women's Centres in towns near my home, short programs using Anna's Gospel as their foundation.

These two ways of using the material are completely different: in the first case I plan to lead a group of Christian women who are already committed to studying the Bible. By comparing Anna's Gospel with the canonical Gospels, I will attempt to raise their consciousness to the androcentrism and patriarchalism of the text, and to help them learn to recover and reconstruct the stories of women that have been buried there. Since this group is already meeting on a regular basis, I plan to offer them a series of seven sessions on this material as part of their on-going study of the Bible. In the second case I hope to introduce groups of women, many of them post-Christian, to a feminist way of looking at the Gospels by the same kind of comparisons, in order that they might understand the way in which the reign-of-God movement and the earliest churches began, and that they might appreciate that this movement was truly a "discipleship of equals," in which women as well as men were respected leaders. Since these women are not meeting regularly, I shall have to try to devise (and advertise) an interesting introductory session that would appeal to

enough of them that subsequent sessions would follow easily. This project has more inherent uncertainties than the project with the Bible study group, but I think that it has the potential to be very rewarding both for the women who may choose to become involved and for myself.

Plan for Bible Study Group

About three weeks in advance of my planned start date, I shall meet briefly with the women of the group to tell them about my proposal, and to ask them if they would mind if other women from the congregation joined us for the series of study sessions. I do not anticipate any problem with this, but I think that it is an essential step, since it is their group, not mine. The series of Bible study sessions will then be announced in the church bulletin for two or three Sundays in advance of the starting date. Any interested women from the congregation will be invited to join the group for the duration of the series.

The plan I have developed is for a series of seven 90 minute sessions, following the structure of the Gospel of Anna. With the exception of the first session, I shall ask the participants to read in advance a passage or passages from one of the canonical Gospels, corresponding to the part of Anna's Gospel that we shall be reading in our next session. We shall then compare these passages (the canonical and Anna) to see what can be learned from their differences.

My overarching consideration in planning these sessions has been the principle, common to Protestant thinking, that every person is entitled to her own opinion concerning the meaning of a biblical passage for her. I do not believe that anyone has the right to tell another that her interpretation of a passage is "incorrect". I intend to make it clear to the participants that I am not setting myself up as an expert, but that I have only suggestions about interpretations of passages, based on scholars' interpretations that I have read, and on what I have learned about first century life. I want to create an atmosphere where the participants can feel free to put forward their own interpretations of the passages being studied. For this reason, I have not set up detailed "lecture-style" outlines of the sessions, but have given indications of the points I wish to make or the concerns I would like to address. However, the participants may wish to take the discussion in other directions on occasion, and I want them to feel free to do that.

Wherever possible, I would like to use the format of dramatic reading of the texts that we are studying, in order for everyone to feel that she has participated in presenting the material. However, I am realistic enough to accept the fact that some of the more elderly women may not feel comfortable with this at first, and so I shall try to ease into this as we go along. The same may be said about ritual, which I have learned to appreciate as a very useful component of learning and spiritual growth. I would like at least to have a closing ritual at our last meeting, but Baptists generally, and older ones in particular, have a certain distrust of anything ritualistic, even so small a thing as lighting a candle, so I plan not to use rituals until after the first few sessions, and then maybe to introduce them very gradually.

Prayer, however, is most definitely a part of the Baptist tradition, and I intend to use opening and closing prayers at each session.

Week 1:

Opening Prayer (said together): "Almighty God, your word is a lamp for our feet and a light upon our path; grant that by patient study of the Scriptures we may follow more closely the way that you set before us."[117] Be present with us now as we begin our study of the stories of Jesus our brother, and guide us with your Holy Spirit that we may hear in our hearts your eternal truths. Amen.

First we'll read aloud, taking turns, Luke 13:10-17 (the "bent-over" woman) and Mark 5: 25-34 (the woman with the hemorrhage), and then the corresponding part of Anna's Gospel (pages 64-68). From these readings questions regarding first century understandings of sickness and healing, miracles, honour and shame, and the purity laws will arise and can be discussed. I shall ask the group to try to forget their knowledge and beliefs about Jesus, and to try to imagine how they would feel as first century women who were eyewitnesses to the events about which we have read, or first century (non-literate) women hearing these stories for the first time. The feminist interpretation point that I wish to make during this session is that the gender of the story-teller makes a difference to the way the story is told. I would like the group to recognize these differences (e.g. naming,

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[117] *A New Zealand Prayer Book* (Auckland, NZ: William Collins Publishers Ltd, 1989), 616.

bringing the women to the centre instead of the margins, hearing from the woman involved rather than from a male narrator.)

Closing Prayer (said together): "Jesus our healer, our help when help has failed, give us courage to expose our need and ask to be made whole, that, being touched by you, we may be raised to new life in the power of your name, Amen."[118]

At the close of this session, participants will be asked to read for next week Mark 6:35-44 (feeding), Matthew 13:33 (parable of the leaven), Luke 14:15-24 (parable of the great feast) and Mark 9:33-37 and 10:13-16 (children).

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[118]adapted from Janet Morley, *All Desires Known: Inclusive Prayers for Worship and Meditation.* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1992),18.

Week 2:

Opening Prayer (said together): Jesus, our teacher, you reach into our lives not through instruction, but story. Open our hearts to your teachings: that seeing, we may perceive; and hearing, we may understand; and understanding, may act upon your word, in your name.[119] Amen.

First we'll check in with everyone, and ask if anyone has questions or concerns about last week's session. We'll begin today's session by discussing the passages that we have read in advance, and then addressing the question of the socio-economic situation of the people of Palestine under Roman occupation in the first century, and also the position of children in that society. Then we'll read aloud Anna's version (pages 68-71) and discuss the differences between it and the canonical Gospels. During this session I hope to stress the egalitarianism and open commensality of Jesus and the reign-of-God movement, and the fact that women were disciples in the circle close to Jesus, and were accepted on an equal footing with men in the reign-of-God movement. I also plan to raise the question of the androcentricity of the text, pointing out how many more stories there are about men than about women, and help the group to discover some of the reasons for this. In doing these things, the fact that biblical language, especially about God, is metaphorical, will be discussed. From this, I hope to be able to introduce some images of God that are female instead of exclusively male, and to begin discussing the use of inclusive language; both of

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[119] Adapted from Morley, *All Desires Known*, 9.

these ideas will generate discussion.

Closing Prayer (said together): Bakerwoman God, we are the soft dough that you shape with your strong and loving hands. Mold us so that we will be truly made in your image and bake us in the fire of your love. Empower us so that we may all be healers in a world in need of your healing. Amen.

Before leaving, participants will be asked to read Mark 7:24-30 (the Syrophoenician woman) and John 4:4-52 (the Samaritan woman at the well) for next week.

Week 3:

Opening Prayer (said together): "Gracious God, you bring us together from many different places; you endow us with varied gifts and responsibilities; you challenge us to respond to your call. Guide our halting steps; sustain us and help us sustain each other; that through our labours, we may help bring your sweet justice into the world."[120] Amen.

Today, after discussing any questions or concerns from last week, we'll do a dramatic reading of the story of the Syrophoenician woman, and I'll ask the participants to express how they feel about the way Jesus responds to her request for healing.Then we'll read aloud Anna's account (pages 78-80), and discuss Justa and what we as Gentiles owe her, as well as the differences between the two versions of the story. Then we'll do another dramatic reading, the story of the Samaritan woman, and discuss the similarities between her and the Syrophoenician woman. A discussion of the relationships between Jews on the one hand and Gentiles and Samaritans on the other will naturally arise here. The feminist interpretation points: first, the Syrophoenician woman's story is the only instance of anyone getting the better of Jesus in a debate; for this to be done by a woman is amazing! Second, this story probably originates in a women's oral traditional story, so in it we can hear the voices of first century women. Third, by virtue of their survival in the androcentric text, these stories tell us that women were prominent in the reign-of-God movement and the early church as missionaries and leaders.

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[120] Slightly altered from The St. Hilda Community, *Women Included: A Book of Services and Prayers* (London: SPCK, 1991), 45.

Today we'll divide the group into left and right sides, and we'll read responsively:

"A Psalm on Living Water"

Left: You are like a mountain spring, O Fountain of Living Water:

Right: I sip from the deep-down freshness of your never-failing love.

Left: You are like a summer rain, O Sudden Benediction:

Right: drench my soul and quench my thirsting spirit with your peace.

Left: You are like a raging sea, O Storm Upon My Ocean:

Right: breaking into bits my fragile bark as I learn to lean on you.

Left: You are like a waterfall, Oasis in My Desert:

Right: source of my heart's survival in the press and stress of life.

Left: You are like a cleansing flood, River of Reconciliation:

Right: washing away the selfish self-serving signs of my sinfulness.

Left: You are like a bottomless well, O Cup of Lifegiving Water:

Right: full up to overflowing. Praise be to you, my God.[121]

Closing Prayer (said together): Jesus our brother, whose word is life, and whose delight is to answer our cry for help and healing, give us faith and courage like the Syrophoenician

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[121]Adapted from Miriam Therese Winter, *Womanword: A Feminist Lectionary and Psalter: Women of the New Testament* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 111.

woman, who refused to remain an outsider.[122] Your call to be your disciple comes to us, as it did to the Samaritan woman, in the midst of our everyday lives; give us discernment to hear your word, grace to leave our water-jugs by the well, and courage to follow empty-handed wherever you may lead, so that your love may be known everywhere.[123] Amen.

For next week, the participants will be asked to read some of the passages containing Jesus' teachings about discipleship (Mt 16:24-26; Mk 8:34-36; Lk 9:23-25) and greatness (Mt 20:25-28; Mk 10:42-45; Lk 12:25-27), and to try to recall how they have heard the call to "deny yourself" and "take up your cross" interpreted.

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[122]Adapted from Morley, *All Desires Known*, 9.

[123]Adapted from Morley, *All Desires Known*, 29.

Week 4:

Opening prayer (said together): "Everliving God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."[124] Help us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus our brother, who did not seek greatness but instead came among us as one who serves. May we rejoice in serving you and one another in love all the days of our lives. Amen.

After our usual check-back to last week's session, we'll discuss the teachings of Jesus on discipleship and greatness as found in the Synoptic Gospels, and then we'll see if anyone can remember how the reference to denying one's self and taking up one's cross have been interpreted in sermons they've heard or in books they've read. Next we'll read the parallel passage from Anna's Gospel (pages 87-88), noting the explanation Anna's Jesus gives to these sayings. In the discussion that is sure to follow, I hope to make the following points of feminist interpretation: Jesus did not ask those who are already in subordinate positions to be servants of those in dominant positions, but those in dominant positions to serve those whom they consider to be beneath them. We'll discuss how this passage has been applied to keep women subordinate to those who dominate them, and on the way in which much of the subordination and repression of the poor, racial minorities, colonialized countries, etc., and of the women in all of these groups, has been based on the dominant culture's wrong interpretation of these passages. We shall also discuss what "taking up one's cross"

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[124]*New Zealand Prayer Book*, 632.

means in today's violent world: not seeking martyrdom, but accepting the fact that if we do God's work, seeking justice and peace for all, crosses will be an inevitable part of our lives.

Closing Prayer (said together): Jesus, we are your disciples; may we live for and love one another. Bless our hands to your service, our feet to your path, our hearts to your purpose, our spirit to dwell in the depths of your Spirit for your glory, now and forever, Amen.[125]

For next week we shall read Mark's account of the events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus: Mk 14:3-9 (the anointing), and also the anointing stories in Luke (7:36-50) and John (12:1-8); and Mk 14:22-25; Mt 26:26-29; Lk 22:15-20 (the last supper).

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[125]Adapted from Winter, *Womanword*, 155.

Week 5:

Opening Prayer (said together): Jesus our Saviour, you anoint us with the oil of your grace; you fill our cup to overflowing with your love; you feed us with the bread of life. Be with us now as we study the events of the last days of your life on earth, that we may understand what these events are saying to us, and learn from them the way of your salvation. Amen.

Today, after our check-back to last week, we'll first have a discussion of the meaning of the Hebrew word Messiah (anointed) and the Greek word Christ(os) (anointed), and the implications of anointing the head and the feet. Then we'll discuss the anointing stories, from which I shall try to make two points: the possible oral tradition behind the stories, and the way such an anointing would have been perceived by its first century hearers. We'll then read Anna's anointing story (pages 86-87) and discuss its differences when compared with the canonical versions, making the point that here a woman is portrayed performing the prophetic function of anointing God's chosen one. Next I'll hand out the canonical "last supper" stories in parallel form, along with the relevant portions of Chapters 9 and 10 of *The Didache*, and we'll discuss the differences between them; the point will be made that even regarding this central Christian symbol, there is no unanimity among the Evangelists and other early Christian writers as to details. This tells us two things: first, that there were many versions of every story about Jesus and the reign-of-God movement circulating orally in first century Palestine, and it is impossible to say that one was authentic

and the others not. Second, the Evangelists, like others at the time, had no conception of or concern for authenticity; they used the oral traditions in the way that best met their needs and the needs of their communities. We'll then read Anna's Gospel (pages 87-88), and discuss the differences, pointing out that Anna's version is one person's idea of the way Jesus' last meal with his disciples may have taken place.

Closing Prayer (said together):Jesus our brother, an un-named woman anointed your head, proclaiming you as the one chosen by God for God's service. May we understand that we have been chosen and anointed by you for your service. As your disciples, help us always to share your love with others, as you shared your love with us. Amen.

For next week we'll read the account of Jesus' arrest (Mk 14:32-50), and the trial and crucifixion (Mk 14:53-15:46).

Week 6:

Opening Prayer (said together): "Lord Jesus Christ, as we kneel at the foot of your cross, help us to see and know your love for us, so that we may place at your feet all that we have and are. Amen."[126]

After our usual check-back, we'll have a brief explanation of crucifixion, emphasizing that only the Roman authority was able to sentence anyone to execution in this (or any) way. This should lead to a short discussion of the way the crucifixion has been used to promote anti-Semitism, and how we can avoid such interpretations. Then we'll do a dramatic reading of Anna's account of the arrest (pages 88-90), and the trials and crucifixion (pages 91-94). We'll discuss how Anna's Gospel is similar to or differs from the canonical Gospels. One point I shall try to make is my reason for not describing what was said at the trials (who was there to report it?), but for telling the story from Anna and Joanna's point of view (the men were on the verge of leaving, but the women stayed, so women are the logical eye-witnesses; I saw no need for an omniscient [male] narrator). I also want to make the point that the women were faithful witnesses to the crucifixion, even though they were in danger of being arrested for being followers of Jesus: they were true disciples. I hope to be able to generate a discussion on the meaning of the cross in our lives today, and to encourage everyone to say how (or if) she feels that the cross is salvific for her. In the course of this discussion, I would like to try to move people away from theologies of

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[126] *A New Zealand Prayer Book*, 587.

sacrifice and atonement, but I recognize that this may not be easy to do without damaging their faith systems, which, of course, I do not want to do.

Closing Prayer (said together): Jesus, whose bitter agony was watched by his women disciples, enable us to follow the example of their persistent love, that, being steadfast in the face of death, we may also know the place of resurrection, in your name, Amen.[127]

For next week we'll read the resurrection stories from all four canonical Gospels (Mk 16:1-8; Mt 28:1-10; Lk 24:1-12; Jn 20:1-18).

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[127]Adapted from Morley, *All Desires Known*, 13.

Week 7:

Opening Prayer (said together): "O God, the power of the powerless, you have chosen as your witnesses those whose voice is not heard. Grant that, as women first announced the resurrection though they were not believed, we too may have the courage to persist in proclaiming your word, in the power of Jesus Christ, Amen."[128]

After our check-back to last week, I'll hand out the resurrection stories in parallel form, as with the "last supper" stories, and we'll read them and discuss their differences. We'll briefly discuss what tombs in Palestine were like, and recall our discussion of last week about the many oral traditional versions of the resurrection story that would have been in circulation . Then we'll do a dramatic reading of Anna's version (pages 94-97), and then discuss how it differs from the canonical Gospels. The points I wish to make in this discussion are: first, the Evangelists are unanimous about the fact that women were the first witnesses of the resurrection, and Mary of Magdala is named by all of them in their accounts. Second, given what we know about the tendency for women to be written out of the text, this tells us that this oral tradition was very strong. I would like to end with a discussion of what the "idea" of resurrection means to all of us today.

Since this is our last session, we'll have a closing ritual, remembering some of the faithful women in the Gospels, named and un-named, who followed Jesus as disciples and

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[128]Morley, *All Desires Known*, 15.

proclaimed the good news of the reign of God:

A Psalm of Unity Among Women of Faith

Leader: How good it is when women of faith are bonded together in unity, when sisters reach out to sisters, when women of the present learn from women of the past. Let us name our sister pioneers. Let us claim our saints.

1: Junia our sister, how good it is to name you:

All: we are inspired by your ministry in Rome.

2: Anna our sister, crippled woman, how good it is to name you:

All: help us to overcome the things that cripple us.

3: Abigail our sister, hemorrhaging woman, how good it is to name you:

All: help us to have the courage to ask Jesus for healing.

4: Miriam our sister, anointing woman, how good it is to name you:

All: give us your spirit of prophecy.

5: Joanna our sister, how good it is to name you:

All: inspire us to discipleship.

6: Mary of Magdala, how good it is to name you:

All: help us to witness to the Risen Christ.

7: All women in the church, our sisters, how good it is to claim you:

Here each woman may name women who have played significant roles in her spiritual growth or religious commitment or in helping her to value herself as a woman. As she does so, she places a flower in a vase of remembrance.

All: You are our tradition of prophets, disciples, ministers, the first of a cloud of witnesses to the work of the Holy Spirit through the women of Christianity. We thank you for your faithfulness. You are role models for us all.[129]

Closing Prayer (said together): Jesus our Saviour, "we seek you in the places you have already left, and fail to see you even when you stand before us."[130] Help us to recognize you in the faces of those who are strangers to us, so that like you we may be freed from what imprisons us. Like the women at the tomb and all women who have followed you, may we be empowered to proclaim your resurrection and your presence with us. Amen.

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[129]Adapted from Winter, *Womanword*, 305-310.

[130]Morley, *All Desires Known*, 14.

This plan for Bible Study with a group of older Baptist women is not without some potential problems. The women who attend may well feel some unease with the fact that I have created my own version of the Jesus story and "fiddled with the text." When one or two of the group asked me about my thesis, I told them that I wrote "a Gospel as it might have been written by a woman disciple." They seemed not to have any difficulty with the idea, and in fact expressed interest in hearing more about it. However, a Bible Study based on Anna's Gospel may prove to be hard for them to accept, and I know that I have to be prepared for some resistance. I hope to dispel some of this resistance by introducing the subject carefully at the first session, explaining something about how the canonical Gospels came to be written, some decades after the events they recount. I do not anticipate serious continued resistance to this approach to interpreting the scriptures, but if it does materialize, I feel sure that the only way to deal with it is by patient explanation of my reasons for writing Anna's story and my belief in the vision of the "discipleship of equals" that it presents. It will also be important to listen to the resistance non-defensively, and to devise ways of drawing out personal experiences from the group which undercut resistance.

A Program for Use in Women's Centres

Because what I am proposing to do in this tentative program is (for me, at any rate) purely experimental, I am unable at this time to prepare a detailed plan for carrying it out. My general plan is as follows: First, my friend Terri Whetstone is one of the co-ordinators of women's centres in Nova Scotia; she has worked quite closely with Second Story, the women's centre in Bridgewater, NS. She is willing to be my contact person there and will ask the clients if any of them would be interested in reading "The Gospel According to Anna." I can then let those interested have copies of the Gospel to read for a week or ten days. At the end of that time, Terri, who is an artist, and I will put together a poster for display at the centre, announcing that I would be available to meet anyone interested in hearing more about Anna's Gospel and discussing it with me and others. Then, it will be a matter of waiting to see who comes to the meeting - possibly no one! If that happens, I shall have to rethink the whole project, perhaps getting ideas from the staff at the centre.

If some people do come, my plan is to let them pretty much set the agenda. Ideally, I would like to work through the whole Gospel, one section at a time, making the points of feminist interpretation as in the program with the Bible study group, but they may have specific issues they want addressed. My objective would be to help the women to understand that the reign-of-God movement was not patriarchal but egalitarian, that women were leaders both in Jesus' time and in the early church, and that the changes that led to silencing and oppression of women were not part of God's intention for humanity.

Building on these two experiments, I have some suggestions for how this work might be used in the future. My church has a tradition of Bible Study on Wednesday evenings, and my minister has suggested that I offer a feminist Bible Study based on Anna's Gospel as an option to the regularly scheduled session which he leads. This would allow some of the younger women of the congregation, who mostly cannot attend a daytime group because of job or family commitments, to learn about feminist biblical interpretation and feminist reconstruction of Christian beginnings. Some of these women have spoken about the lack of feminist teaching in the church in general, and were overjoyed when they heard that I might be willing to lead such a study. Their enthusiasm, which I witnessed myself only this Easter, means that I would be able to do more with this group than with the older group, since they are already favourably disposed to the idea of feminist interpretation.

There is also a possibility for workshops and study sessions at Atlantic School of Theology, the seminary which I attended before coming to Episcopal Divinity School. It has been suggested that I might be asked to assist with teaching at AST as adjunct faculty in the Biblical Studies Department. If this happens, it might be possible for me to initiate a voluntary Bible Study group for women students there, which might lead to other avenues for exposing students to feminist biblical interpretation, an area in which courses are not presently offered. There may also be

other opportunities to use this work in teaching or study-group situations that will allow me to spread the Gospel according to Anna, and I look forward to whatever possibilities arise in the future.

Epilogue

This work closes with a reflection on the process of imagining, developing and completing a project such as this. It began in October of 1994; I was a student in a class on "Healing, Suffering and the Death of Christ in the New Testament". Professor Joanna Dewey suggested that for my term paper I might, instead of writing another exegetical paper, do "something more creative." When I expressed doubts about my creative ability, she said that I should sleep on it, and see what I thought. I left her office still convinced that I would write an exegetical paper, but prepared to think about creative alternatives.

A couple of days after this conversation with Joanna, I attended her performance of "Women on the Way - a Feminist Retelling of the Gospel of Mark". This performance had a profound effect on me, and on reflection I realized that this was because it was the first time I had heard the gospel story told from a woman's point of view, with humour, down-to-earth women's wit, and with a feeling of immediacy and reality that I had never experienced from reading the Gospel or hearing it read. I had just had my first lesson on the power of oral story-telling.

Meanwhile, for Alison Cheek's course on "Learning to Lead Small-group Bible Study from a Feminist Perspective", I was reading her thesis, with its letter from Junia to Anna, and preparing to co-lead (with two classmates) a Bible study on Luke 13:10-13, the

story of the healing of the "bent-over woman". Although I wasn't conscious of them, all of these things - Joanna's suggestion for a more creative project, her very moving oral re-telling of Mark's Gospel, Junia and Anna, and Luke's bent-over woman - were probably whirling around in my subconscious when I went to bed the next night.

Sometime during the night, I had a dream, the details of which are now lost, but the gist of it was that Anna was the bent-over woman, not old, as I'd always imagined, but young. It was her friend Junia who took her to be healed, and afterwards both became disciples. In some strange way, I felt that I was Anna, and that her story of the events of Jesus' life, teachings and death needed to be told. I woke up in the middle of the night with all this quite clear in my mind, but knowing that if I just went back to sleep I'd never remember it in the morning. So I got up, scribbled something on a piece of paper, and went back to bed.

In the morning, it took me a few minutes to decipher the scrawl that was the product of this midnight ramble, and to remember what it was all about, but when I did, the dream came back to me quite vividly. With that recollection I knew that I would write "The Gospel According to Anna" for my term paper. And in a strange but no less vivid way I felt that God had a hand in all this, and that the constellation of events was a sign of grace. I felt sure that the inspiration had come from God, and that God would be with me as I wrote. That feeling never left me.

When I began to plan the paper, I had very hazy ideas about what I would include and what I would leave out, although I realized that the nature of the course required that I deal with some healings and teachings about suffering, and that I include a passion narrative. I felt as if I were seated at a huge banquet table, spread with all the stories from the canonical Gospels; they were my sources, and I could pick and choose which I would use and which I would leave out. I felt as I imagined the Evangelists must have felt, surrounded by such riches and being free to choose as suited my purpose. I decided to begin with Anna's healing, and decide later where to go next. I felt that if God had guided me to this point, she wouldn't desert me now.

I was right; it seemed that once I started, the Gospel almost wrote itself, and I had recurring feelings of words flowing out of my fingertips onto the keyboard without being quite sure where they had come from or in what direction they were leading me. My characters took on lives of their own, and I discovered that there were some thoughts that I wasn't even aware I had until they appeared on the screen of my computer. The strangest of these was the story about Anna and Joanna putting on the men's cloaks and going into Jerusalem to be witnesses to the events of Jesus' trials. This story came without pre-planning, but seemed to have been lying in wait, ready to pounce onto the page when the right moment came. I felt as if I were actually there, writing an eye-witness account.

Now, more than a year later, I am able to reflect on the whole process, not only the creative endeavour of writing the Gospel, but the more academic work of the chapters on

feminist critique, the changing role of women in the early church, Sophia christology, and the use of the material in ministry. Writing Anna's Gospel in the first instance for the course was exhilarating and challenging; expanding it for the thesis/project required more planning and greater re-working of some of the material than I had thought it would. I discovered that if a story is to be more than entertainment for the moment, it needs organization; if it is to make theological points, it needs both organization and a theological framework. I also discovered that it is not easy to write theology in narrative form when one is trying to remain within the first century world-view; anachronisms are insidious enemies of the unwary would-be narrative theologian.

My greatest difficulty in writing the expanded version of Anna's Gospel lay in the fact that I was trying to write a narrative that presented my twentieth century viewpoint in language that had to reflect the mind-set of a person of the first century, and there were times that I found that this was almost impossible. I also realized that I should not try to present the product of centuries of theological reflection as if it could have been formulated by Mary, Junia and Anna in a few years: their thinking about the meaning of Jesus' life had to be framed in first century terms, which was not easy. I am not even sure that it was successfully done. In spite of the difficulties, however, writing the narrative gave me much more of a feeling of expressing the immediacy of the events and of being able to imagine the feelings of those involved than writing purely expository prose. Strangely enough, I found that it was easier to speak as a first century woman in the letter from Anna to Junia than it was in the text of the Gospel itself, possibly because I was responding to Alison

Cheek's beautifully written letter from Junia. The letter form also made it easier to present my views directly, in contrast to the narrative, where I had to encode them in the story.

I think that the greatest advantage of expressing my theology and christology in story form was that it allowed me, and I hope that it allows the reader, to enter briefly into the lives of Anna and her fellow disciples, and to imagine a little of what their experience of being with Jesus as part of the reign-of-God movement was like. Each disciple, after all, was an individual, with feelings and ideas, loves and hates; lumping them all together as "the disciples" risks stereotyping them. Writing from the point of view of one of them, however, allows each of us, writer and reader, the unique privilege of being inside that woman's skin for a short while, and of seeing ourselves in her person.

Finally, I think that using an imaginative narrative, certainly not historical, but not quite fictional either, brings home to us, in a way that other forms of discourse cannot, the fact that women were at the centre of the beginnings of Christian faith. Women were disciples; women were witnesses of Jesus' death and burial; women were witnesses to and proclaimers of the resurrection. Writing or reading these foundational stories from one woman's point of view brought the fact of the presence of women into sharper focus for me, and made the androcentric texts with which we are all so familiar recede somewhat into the background for a little while. In doing this, it also clarified in my mind the image of the reign of God as God intended it to be, as Jesus proclaimed it, and as his women disciples (and maybe even some of the men) worked to bring it about.

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